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during my stay in the country, so that my description is based on the account of informants. But their account tallies with the ancestral sacrifices I had seen elsewhere; and the *Dibo Saba* ritual is, in essence, nothing but a sacrifice to the *kuci* of an ancestor, though both the ancestor and his invocation are here matters of public concern. This double significance of the ritual is clearly expressed by the people, who would say that, on this occasion, the chief is performing two sacrifices at once, one for his own 'house', and the other for the 'whole town'. It is interesting to note that the present chief of Doko does not come of the dynasty of Dibo Saba but of a new family, which came to power two generations ago; even so, he continues the sacrifice to this alien ancestor. In other words, the transformation of the chief's private kinship rite into an official and public ceremonial has become complete. In the ceremonial the chief, accompanied by the older men, sacrifices beer, a goat, or some other food over the grave of Dibo Saba and addresses both the *kuci* and *Sokó*. The choice of the sacrificial animal depends on the diviner's instruction. The formula of prayer is of the usual kind, mentioning the need of rain (or whatever the cause), of food in abundance, and ends with the stereotyped wish that 'the whole town may prosper'.

(iii) *Fixed Rituals*

Let me start with the simplest of the three, the ritual called *sakó* (meaning 'Great Deer'). As already mentioned, it is 'owned' by the hereditary hunters of Doko, that is, by a small number of families, all kinsmen of the *Maji Egbe* ('Master of the Hunt') and descended from some earlier holder of that office. In Doko everybody is also a hunter, or can be one if he is so inclined, and every house has its bows and arrows, traps, and hunting nets. Conversely, all the hereditary hunters are also farmers. But it falls to them to organize the large-scale drives carried out in the dry season (now increasingly rarely since the bigger game is fast disappearing), and it falls to the head of this group to ensure, by ritual means, success in hunting. He receives a share of the big game killed by any Doko man; he also keeps the horns of buck and deer killed by his own group in a small hut in his house, while other people would throw these trophies away. Whenever the Master set out on a large-scale hunt or desires to invoke his ancestors, he pours a small libation of beer outside this hut, addressing an anonymous *kuci*. In his case, then, the hut containing the trophies replaces the ancestral grave or shrine of other families. Once a year, the same offering is brought in order to secure good hunting for the whole community, the ritual being now performed in the Master's sleeping hut. No particular secrecy surrounds the sacrifice, though it

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prosperity. But again, both kinds are irregularly employed; all that can be said is that the sex, colour or species of the animals is *laid down*, and hence stands for a rule significant as such.

A few words must here be said about the whole conception of the Nupe sacrifice. It seems anomalous that a non-personified deity or an abstract 'cosmic force' should be offered food and drink. But the prayer formula accompanying the offering speaks concretely of 'giving' these to God or *kuti*, just as the name of at least one ritual implies that the *kuti* (or the stone representing it) 'drinks' the fluid offered. The name for sacrifice, *labá*, offers no further clue; denoting the actual offering as well as the prayer accompanying it, it does not separate the former from the general act of worship. The offering is thus a gesture among others: like the prayer formula, meant to break through the aloofness of the deity, the sacrificial gift serves to attract and hold his attention. In either case the gesture used is borrowed from everyday life, the prayer employing ordinary language, the sacrifice items normally offered by clients to patrons. And this conception of a 'normal' gift is once more consistent with the notion that the various *kuti*, precisely like persons of rank and standing, command their special 'greetings'. If the offerings are anomalous, they share this character with all the other forms of addressing God and *kuti* and indeed with the very conceptions of the deity and of the Force-that-is-in-ritual.

Let me note briefly that the same anomaly also holds in the case of sacrifices made to ancestors or over the vessels of 'great' medicines. The former, as we remember, are brought to the disembodied souls which are 'with God'; mostly, too, they are accompanied by invocations addressed at once to God and *kuci*. The sacrifices to medicines again involve the invocation of God; and though they consist in offerings of beer, morsels of food, and the blood of the sacrificial animal, they are, as we shall see, also understood to strengthen the impersonal force that is imputed to the substance of medicine. Nor are the offerings to spirits, de-humanized beings that they are, any less anomalous; indeed, in a different context I recorded the positive assertion that 'spirits do not eat'.

The first two observances may, like ritual proper, include the sacrificial meal of the congregation; the sacrifice to ancestors does so in most cases, the sacrifice to 'great' medicines only where it has fused with a *kuti* or with *kuci* worship. Invariably, however, the inclusion of the communal meal, even where it means merely a sharing-out of beer, entails the invocation of God, and not only of ancestors or of the 'force' of medicine. Yet the sacrificial meal has in no way the significance of a sacrament. The meal undoubtedly represents a sacred occasion, although it may show

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little trace of awe or emotional thrill.[1] But there is no conception of consuming things sacred in themselves and hence of sharing bodily a token of divinity. The crucial aspect of the sacrificial meal lies in the fact that here God and his worshippers eat and drink together; and if this is a symbolic act, its symbolism merely points to, and confirms, the 'fellowship and mutual social obligations' between deity and congregation. Much the same point was made by Robertson Smith in his discussion of the ancient semitic sacrifice, and I can do no better than quote from him: 'The one thing directly expressed in the sacrificial meal is that the god and his worshippers are *commensals*, but every other point in their mutual relations is included in what this involves. Those who sit at meat together are united for all social effects; those who do not eat together are aliens to one another, without fellowship in religion and without reciprocal social duties'.[2]

Here we are no longer dealing with symbols in the strict sense of the word but with a new type of significance, bearing on things of very general social import and established by means of a relevant parallelism between the form of ritual and the norms governing social relationships. Before turning to this aspect let me mention another border zone of symbolism in ritual, where the symbolic function of modes of acting overlaps with their direct, causal, efficacy. The modes of acting, in other words, both 'point to' a state of affairs relevant to the aims of the ritual, and also cause this state of affairs to materialize. The instance I have in mind is the sexual taboo of the *gunnu*, followed by a period of licence. The fact that normal sexual relations are first suspended and afterwards conspicuously resumed must clearly focus attention upon sex and procreation, and upon the sequence of 'end' and 'new beginning'; so that this rule of acting comes to symbolize the central theme of the cult. Equally, however, the prohibition, rendered more severe by the provocation of the 'mixed dance', and its subsequent lifting produce both tensions and catharsis, and generally add to the stimulations generated in the ritual: and in this sense they simply engineer or create the required mood and expectations.

Generally speaking, then, strict (and comprehended) symbolism plays no great part in Nupe ceremonial. In a different sense, however, all ceremonials operate with modes of acting which 'point beyond themselves' in a manner analogous to signs or symbols. They no longer serve merely as 'reminders', nor do they bear upon

[1] This is borne out by the usual translation of the Nupe word *bikí* into Hausa-Arabic; using the latter phraseology the Nupe would speak of *walima*, 'sacred feast'.

[2] *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 1907, p. 269.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CULTS

General

771 The majority of the Nupe are now Moslems and there is at least one small [162] mosque in every village. The 1931 Census gave 235,990 Moslems out of a total of 324,375 for all religions.[1] But in many communities pagan ritual exists side by side with some Moslem observances, the latter being increasingly adopted for reasons of prestige.

Among the pagans there is common belief in a sky god *Sokó*, who is believed to have created the world and then withdrawn himself from communion with man. The Nupe concept of the cosmos is, according to Nadel, fundamentally amoral. God, having created the world, gave men access to certain mystical forces, making them at the same time subject to these and leaving them to make such use of these " powers " and of the material world as they would and could. First among these mystical forces is *kuti*, the compelling power of ritual, believed to be harnessed in varying degrees in a multiplicity of rites belonging to persons, communities, and associations, and conferring both special benefits or protection and increasing general well-being. At the same time, invocation of the ancestors of kinsfolk, of the people at large, and of the ancient rulers, can afford some measure of benefit or protection. This can also be gained through a separate use of " medicines " which are believed variously to combine pseudo-therapeutic and magical properties. Finally, the evil power of witchcraft, which God also put into the world, has to be discovered, punished, and driven out by special rites. Since, moreover, there are these alternatives with reference to both good fortune and bad, divination has a great part to play in determining the rites to be performed in particular situations.[2]

Spirits

776 The Nupe believe that immaterial beings, existing in their own right and with some human attributes, live in the bush or in hills, trees, watercourses, and other natural features. Their Hausa-Arabic name (*aljenúši*, sing. *aljénu*) suggests that some aspects of this belief may be borrowed from Islam. The spirits may be male or female, friendly or hostile, though only two—*Ndáduma* (Father Niger) and *Ketsá* (associated with a rock in midstream near Jebba Island)—are thought to possess any considerable powers.[3] Another group of spirits is vaguely associated with animals. The least clearly conceived are personal spirits or spirit doubles, which belong to every individual from birth to death and cannot be changed. These may be good or bad.[4]

769 Spirits of the dead (*kuci*) may be reincarnated in their own descendants. 776 Approach to the Supreme Being can be made through ancestral spirits. Special sacrifices are performed either in the house or on the grave of a particular ancestor and the *kuci* are invariably invoked in the ceremonials surrounding birth, marriage, and death. Otherwise it seems that ancestral sacrifices are performed only sporadically and for a specific reason, such as illness in the family.[5]

776 Tsoede, who is regarded by all Nupe as their common ancestor, is venerated in an elaborate cycle of myths and rituals surrounding sacred objects—chains and bronze figures—connected with him.[6] He is, however, outside the general framework of Nupe religious beliefs.

[1] Census of Nigeria, vol. II, p. 63. Unfortunately there are no later figures available for comparison.
[2] See below, pp. 47–8.
[3] See below.
[4] Nadel, 1954a, pp. 26–31.
[5] Ibid., pp. 23–5.
[6] Ibid., pp. 31–2.

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Kudu and occupy the rich oil-palm district of Yeti. The name Kyedye, finally, is often used synonymously for all canoe-men and fishermen on the main river. Unity of environment, a uniform productive system, a uniform material culture, represent a first aspect of the cultural unity of the sub-tribe.

Then there is language, certain linguistic differences which throw into relief the cultural boundaries between sub-tribes. The Žitako, Ebe, and Kupa still speak dialects which differ considerably from each other and from the Nupe spoken in the rest of the country. To-day most people in these sub-tribes are bilingual and understand and speak both their own dialect and 'Nupe proper'. The Gbedegi, too, are said to have spoken a special dialect, only a generation or two ago. No trace is left of their language; I found only one old man in Jebba Island who could speak a little Gbedegi. In the area where Nupe proper is spoken only insignificant dialectal differences exist. This linguistic unification within Nupe is the counterpart of the expansion of Nupe language (Nupe proper) and culture beyond the tribal boundaries. Both reflect the same development. The linguistic unification proceeded from the political centre of Nupe kingdom, the area of the Beni, Kyedye, and Bataci sub-tribes. Their dialects, identified with the language of the Nupe state, gradually came to embrace all other tribal sections. The language map of Nupe reveals the phases of this process, the stages in the growth of a supreme, unified culture. We can see the resistance to assimilation increase as we move away from the centre of expansion: the dialects spoken on the borders of the kingdom are losing their identity more slowly and more reluctantly than the dialects of the groups in the centre. The last phase of this development is not yet completed. We are yet to see the full Nupe-ization of Žitako, Ebe, and Kupa.

But in the centre of this expansion the differentiation between cultural centre and periphery gains a new meaning. It is conceived of as a differentiation not of dialects representative of tribal sections, but of dialects, or forms of *patoi*, representative of a cultural and social milieu and upbringing. To-day we have a Bida-Nupe, a 'higher', more refined Nupe (a Nupe which, for example, has replaced many Nupe words by words adopted from Hausa and Arabic); and we have, besides, the cruder, 'low', peasant Nupe—sometimes called 'pagan' Nupe—spoken in the districts. However, this new attitude towards cultural differences, this evaluation on the scale of a 'lower' and 'higher', a more or less refined culture, belongs to another chapter.

The cultural unity of the sub-tribe manifests itself also in the religious field. Certain cults and rituals are peculiar to single sub-tribes, and inter-tribal contact and assimilation have hardly obscured these cultural boundaries. Certain cults, bound up with conditions of environment, seem linked naturally to special areas: a sacrifice to the mythical ancestor of kola-nut planting among the Kusopa; cults which have to do with the water, with floods, with the dangers of the river, and success and safety in fishing, among the riverain groups. The *elo* ritual, and the *mamma* cult, masked ceremonies, are known only among the Gbedegi; the *žikinta* among the Ebe, the *gani* among the Benu, the 'white' *gunnu*

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among the tribes on the southern bank of the Niger, and (a negative evidence mentioned already) the *ndakó gboyá*, which is regarded as 'typical' Nupe by Hausa and Yoruba, is unknown among Dibo and Ebe. There are also other rituals and cults which cannot be assigned (at least not to-day) to a certain sub-tribe, and finally rituals and cults which represent the cultural possession of single village communities. In brief, the possession of a common cult means only an external uniformity of culture. None of these rituals implies co-operation and actual contact in the group at large. They are still but the expression of parallel, 'like', behaviour and not of concrete co-activity and 'togetherness'.

This is equally true of the other cultural features on which the cultural identity of the sub-tribe rests. The consciousness of a cultural uniformity is supported by the actual existing uniformity. But there is still no organized centre of co-activity behind this uniformity or behind the transmission of the consciousness of this uniformity. We can only say this: the sub-tribe, much more than the tribe, constitutes a potentiality of such co-activity and intensive 'togetherness'. The links of a common language, of similar economic pursuits, similar interests, parallel religious ideas, may grow easily into links of co-operation and 'togetherness'. Only in two cases, however, has this potentiality become reality—among the two sub-tribes Kyedye and Beni. In no other section are there contacts and forms of co-activity which make the sub-tribe 'one country', and its people 'one group'. How, then, does that cultural uniformity crystallize into the unified, conscious commonness of 'one country'?

I have described elsewhere the growth and organization of one of the two sub-tribes which have evolved such unified structure.[1] Let me repeat here the main facts. The growth of the Kyedye organization was the growth of a colonizing and conquering group. Expanding from one centre—Muregi, near the confluence of Niger and Kaduna—the Kyedye established themselves in the course of time all along the river banks. They built their settlements on the land of the aboriginal sections, Bataci and riverain Gbedegi, and claimed rulership over them. Twin villages arose, half Kyedye and half Bataci or Gbedegi, from which the Kyedye administered the district, assuming judicial authority and levying taxes. This colonization is still going on, and their rulership, rigidly centralized, is still alive and undisputed.[2] Close contact, intermarriage, and regular new emigration link the settlements, old and new, capital and colonies. Delegates from Muregi, relatives of the Kyedye chief, reside in the settlements, and these administrative 'posts' are correlated with the ranks which the delegates hold in the Kyedye hierarchy; promotion in rank involves promotion to a more important as well as more lucrative post. This closely knit ruling group precludes all permanent links between the cultural groups which this political development has thrown

[1] See 'The Kede: A Riverain State in Northern Nigeria', in *African Political Systems*, Oxford University Press, London, 1940, pp. 165–95.

[2] Only twenty or thirty years ago have the Kyedye established themselves on the river Kaduna, or on Jebba Island, a place which had only then become of economic importance.

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PREFACE

THIS book is intended as a sequel to my first monograph on the Nupe people, *A Black Byzantium*, the material presented there—on economic and political organization, and on kinship and the regulations of adolescence—being largely presupposed in the present volume. Here and there, however, the run of the argument necessitated a somewhat fuller reference to the data contained in the earlier book, so that repetitions and some overlapping could not altogether be avoided. Much the same applies to various papers which I previously published on particular aspects of Nupe culture. 128

In one respect the present account might seem incomplete; for it omits the full discussion of a topic not previously treated and one well suited to the context of a book on religion, namely, myths and legends. The reason for this omission is partly a practical one, since an exhaustive treatment of Nupe legends, which would inevitably lead on to ordinary tales and folklore, would have overburdened the present volume. But partly, the omission can be justified on the grounds that these tales and legends are of relatively little relevance for the understanding of Nupe religion, which point will be dealt with in due course.

As readers of *A Black Byzantium* will know, the Nupe people are today in great measure Mohammedanized, the influence of Islam steadily encroaching upon the indigenous form of worship. If, therefore, in this description of Nupe religion I were to take my lead from the actually obtaining state of affairs, I should have to assign equal weight to Nupe–Islam and to the traditional creed, if not indeed to give prominence to the former. In fact, I have done the reverse; more precisely, I have treated Islam in Nupe as an intrusion, as an instance (to use the familiar phrase) of 'culture contact', and the indigenous religion as my true or main subject-matter. I do not think that this viewpoint needs to be specially defended. The fact that the traditional observances had already disappeared from many parts of the country during my stay in 1934–6 and have probably receded even further since, far from detracting from our interest in the indigenous creed, only renders 128 771

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the task of recording and analysing it more important as well as pressing.

A purely technical point in conclusion. It is always difficult to decide, in books of this kind, just how much scope should be given to vernacular words and quotations. Clearly, in a topic like religion certain crucial terms must be given, or must at least be introduced, in the vernacular. But too generous a use of the indigenous language is both clumsy and confusing to the reader. I have therefore tried to reduce it to a minimum. Nor do I think that this entails a serious loss of accuracy; for even the most intricate vernacular terms are translatable, even though the translation itself might have to be specially explained and perhaps justified: which is precisely the procedure I propose to adopt.

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I

THE NUPE CREED

I. PROLEGOMENA

THE title of this book, *Nupe Religion*, suggests a logical unity in our subject-matter which, at the very outset, might appear problematical. Two questions, in particular, might be raised. First, are we in fact dealing with *one* religion of *one* people, that is, with beliefs and practices which both form a coherent system and occur uniformly throughout the society? And second, how far are we dealing with 'religion' in the strict sense of the word, and with it alone, to the exclusion of 'magic', mere 'superstitions', and other, cruder forms of belief?

The answer to the first question cannot be given in the form of a simple 'yes' or 'no'; nor can all the issues involved properly be judged so early in the discussion. Let me, however, anticipate the relevant points. The religious beliefs and practices of the Nupe differ considerably in different parts of the country; we shall frequently meet with local cults and with forms of worship varying from region to region, even from village to village. Furthermore, the main acts of worship, their execution and promises, concern the single village community, and not that widest group, the Nupe people or tribe. Nor indeed is that widest group an unequivocal unit. The people who call themselves Nupe are internally divided in various ways—by ethnic descent, by tribal segmentation and, partly, political allegiance, by the cleavage between urban and peasant population, and by the barriers of social class. The bulk of the Nupe people is held together in the kingdom of that name, and in the following description we shall mainly be concerned with the politically united tribe or nation. Even so, certain of the internal divisions remain, and these, too, entail corresponding divergences in religious belief and practice.

It might seem, therefore, that in speaking of 'Nupe religion' we are merely employing a convenient descriptive phrase, a summary reference of the kind ethnographers find useful when they wish to state that such-and-such observances are found in a particular group or area. But the phrase is intended to mean more than this.

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The varieties of belief and practice found in Nupe are at least roughly akin, both in their content and in what might be called their style; though they exhibit no conspicuous uniformity or even consistency, they yet hang together in relevant respects and also reflect an identical psychological tenor. Most important of all, the people themselves think of their religion in terms of such an underlying unity; indeed, as we shall see, they tend to exaggerate it. Thus, though the local observances may differ and the congregations in acts of worship be no larger than single village communities, there is a clear understanding that the diverse and separate practices are instances of a common creed. When the people performing one kind of ceremonial comment on the different usage in another part of the country, they yet imply that the two belong together or, more precisely, belong to something wider than both. So that, over and above internal divisions, the people draw the (to them) much more important distinction between the sum total of beliefs and practices in their tribe, and the different totals of this kind in others.

It must be emphasized, however, that for the people this over-all unity is not constituted by the intrinsic coherence of the religious usages that happen to occur in their tribe; it is constituted, rather, by the fact that these usages do occur in their tribe and hence are typical of and valid for a given people or society. That collective entity—the people called Nupe—is the basic premiss; the diverse beliefs and practices are construed into a common creed on that basis.

The precise relationship between the total society and the 'total creed' will occupy us at a later stage. Here we might note that the Nupe have no special, collective name for their religion. They have names only for particular conceptions, single practices, local ceremonials. As for the total creed, the Nupe can describe it only circuitously and enumeratively, as being concerned with the God *Soko*, and not with deities named differently; with such-and-such rituals or 'medicines', and not with others; with spirits, but not anthropomorphous ones, and so forth. Yet it is for them a 'total creed' none the less. If it be argued that this cannot be so, since in this case the people would have found a way of summarizing all these aspects in a name indicative of their over-all unity (as we do when we speak of Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism), the answer is that they do not think of their creed in that way. As they think of it, it has no identity apart from its validity-for-a-society, so that it would be meaningless to define it by a separate concept. Differently expressed, Nupe religion is a tribal or national religion, and *one* inasmuch as a tribe or nation claims it as its own.

To turn to our second question, which, let this be stressed, is of a purely preliminary order. It is here raised, not for the sake of

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discussing the meaning or essence of religious belief or of separating its relevant varieties, but merely in order to outline the kind of data that have been included in this book and to justify their inclusion. The word 'religion' will here be understood in the widest and loosest sense. I have not, for example, made the familiar distinction between religion and magic a criterion for the selection or arrangement of the material. Not that the Nupe are without observances and concepts which merit the name 'religious', however narrowly understood. But other beliefs and practices, though they might not satisfy the criteria of 'religion proper', will not for that reason be excluded or kept on one side.

It does not seem very difficult to define our position in general terms. Convenient phrases are at hand, such as: By 'religion' shall here be meant all beliefs and practices implying communication with and control of the supernatural, whether this is attempted through appeals and prayers to some transcendental intelligence (in the manner of religion) or quasi-mechanically, by the manipulation of 'magic' agencies. But this equation of religion with 'supernaturalism' (as Lowie would say), convenient though it may be, only poses further problems of definition; and the familiar category of the 'supernatural' proves on closer inspection to be itself ambiguous.

When speaking of attempts at communicating with or controlling the supernatural we are clearly viewing the situation through the eyes of the people we are studying, imputing to *them* the thought of transcending the given reality; we should probably impute to them also definite attitudes and feelings relating to the things transcendental, such as awe or fear, humility or ecstasy, or the emotional concentration we call worship. Yet when we try to define the supernatural itself we are driven to assume the opposite viewpoint and to judge the transcendentality of things by our own way of thinking. Nor, indeed, can we avoid veering round from one viewpoint to the other, since neither is by itself fully satisfactory.

Consider that any definition of the supernatural must introduce the contrast with the domain of empirical and scientific knowledge; more precisely, when judging any action or notion to be concerned with the supernatural we assert by implication that it is concerned with existences or influences (beings, 'powers', 'forces') the assumption of which conflicts with the principles of empirical enquiry and verification.[1] And since these principles and

[1] It must be emphasized that the relevant conflict is with the *principles* of empirical knowledge and with the *methods* of scientific enquiry, not merely with the body of information extant at any given moment. For in the latter case any scientific theory in advance of existing ideas or techniques of verification would be 'supernatural'.

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ooo besides 'religion proper', also that 'border zone', composed of mere superstitions; of science misconstrued or all-too-crudely attempted; and of science aiming too high or incompletely severed from mystic thought.

2. DOGMA AND MYTH

771 The preceding discussion has to some extent laid down already what must be our first concern—to outline the basic categories in which the Nupe frame their transcendental knowledge and thus to express the crucial distinction between things religious and profane. This task clearly implies more than merely compiling a glossary and commenting on its items. These basic categories will embody already an essential part of the dogma or doctrine of the religion. For any dogma or doctrine, being a body of assertions and propositions, must employ the language of these basic categories; the significance we discover in the latter will already point to the tenets of the creed; while whatever further information might be derived from the doctrinal assertions, will in turn elucidate the terms of the 'glossary'.

In a sense, we cannot approach the dogma of Nupe religion in any other way. Like most primitive societies, the Nupe have not formulated their creed *ad hoc*, in a specific and coherent body of statements; nor is there any institutionalized teaching of doctrine on which we could rely. Rather, we must piece the creed together, from current sayings and from comments or arguments put forth in discussion, from the songs and prayers accompanying ceremonials and from the observation of the latter. There is, in many primitive societies, another source, again linguistic, which we could use, namely, the mythology of the people. Though dogma and myth are clearly not the same thing, they are akin in that both embody the tenets of the creed and the basic categories of religious thought: myths, of course, do so indirectly, through presenting (or concealing) the articles of creed in accounts of miraculous happenings, in narratives of some kind, which are meant to illustrate and exemplify rather than enunciate (in the manner of dogma). It has, in fact, been suggested long ago that in primitive religions, since they are without formulated doctrine, we must look for the 'key to ritual and practice', not in dogma, but in myth.[1]

None of this holds for the Nupe. To begin with, they do not separate 'myths' conceptually from secular traditions or 'historical' narratives, having the same term for both and relating

[1] W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 1907, pp. 16–17.

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both on the same, profane, occasions.[1] More important, Nupe mythology is altogether flimsy and rudimentary. It illustrates only two tenets of the creed, the conception of a supreme deity and the role of 'medicine', while others, for example, the equally basic conception of 'ritual', are given no such expression. Nor does the mythology concern itself more than scantily with cosmological speculations or with the justification of particular ceremonies.

Certain legends meant to account for particular practices or ceremonials will be quoted later, in that context. Let me here illustrate my point by relating the one cosmological myth the Nupe possess. It is, strictly speaking, only 'near-cosmological', being concerned, not with the origin of the world and of all the things and creatures in it, but only with the origin of man, of the Nupe people, and of one observance (which is incorrectly stated). The myth, incidentally, may not be entirely a Nupe creation; the names of the first human beings mentioned in it have a Mohammedan flavour ;[2] and certain details of the narrative (the bull who appears out of the water, and his strange language) occur in almost the same form among the Bororó Fulani.[3] However this may be, the myth is far from well known, so that for this reason also it cannot be considered a relevant expression of the Nupe creed.

'In the beginning, there was a man called Ancestor Adā and a woman called Ancestress Adama. They had two children, one male, one female, who in turn begot two children, male and female. The male child died immediately after birth, while the girl stayed alive. When she grew up she spoke a strange language which her parents could not understand. But a bull who one day rose from the river when the girl was standing on the bank understood the language. He talked to the girl, and the two became friends. Later the bull became the girl's lover, and she bore him a male child. This child again spoke and understood the strange language. When the boy grew up, he used to go to the bank of the river to talk to the bull, until one day the bull climbed out of the river and followed the boy on dry land wherever he went. This boy was the ancestor of the "Cow Fulani", and the bull the first of the Fulani cattle.

'Ancestress Adama had a third child, a girl called Mureamu (Miriam or Mary), who had three children, two sons and a daughter. When they grew up the two young men both desired their sister. They quarrelled and one was killed. It was thus that

[1] The word in question is *etā*, meaning 'stories of old times', and these are told in daytime, not at night (as are stories meant for amusement), when people would be 'too tired to listen to serious things'.

[2] See below, p. 247.

[3] See F. W. de St. Croix, *The Fulani of Northern Nigeria*, p. 8.

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771 death and murder first appeared in the world. The couple who remained did not know what to do with the dead body. They 773 carried the corpse on their shoulders for three days, lamenting and 539 crying, but could not get rid of it. At last, God caused the earth to open, and they placed the body inside. Thus the practice of burial and of the three days' mourning for the dead began.[1] The couple now stayed together and begot a male child, who became the ancestor of the Nupe people.'

771 If, then, Nupe mythology is a very inadequate guide to dogma and doctrine, this inadequacy is itself significant, revealing the Nupe attitude towards their creed and indeed the whole tenor of their religious thought in their true perspective. Mythology, as we have said, illustrates and exemplifies rather than enunciates the creed. We may go further and say that it expresses the creed in a form less abstract and theoretical than does formulated doctrine. For myths borrow the phraseology of realistic accounts, dealing as they do with near-humans and near-natural events; thus they make less demand upon sheer credence, compromise with ordinary imagination, and as it were vulgarize the dogma. If, then, primitive religions rely on mythical narratives rather than on dogmatic assertions they seem to discard the more abstract contents of religious thought. Yet Nupe religion, which does not employ mythology either to any great extent, is clearly not of this kind. If the Nupe do not attempt a specific, coherent formulation of their creed, neither do they seek to re-phrase it in more concrete and would-be realistic language. In other words, Nupe religion forgoes the means of 'vulgarizing' the dogma. Thus, though its creed may be inarticulate, yet it is held in all abstractness.

3. CATEGORIES

(i) *God and the World*

779 The most basic concept of Nupe theology, that of the supreme being, is also the widest. In a sense it stands for the whole realm 776 of religion, serving to separate all things that belong to that realm from others that do not. For in order to express this distinction the Nupe say of an object, phenomenon, or type of action that it is, or is not, *nyá Sokó*—'of God' or 'belonging to God'. There are two inaccuracies in this broad category of things religious. The clause 'of God' in the sense here understood is properly applied only in the context of discussions turning upon the dichotomy of the religious and profane. In a wider context the phrase loses its disjunctive implication; for ultimately everything is 'of God', that

[1] There is no such rule of 'three days' mourning'.

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fessional divination in some measure duplicate one another. If this means that the diviner has no monopoly of prophecy, it equally means that one need not be very seriously concerned over one's dreams, since the message they might hold would also transpire in some other way. Normally, in fact, the people are not inclined to take their dreams very seriously, even in the localities where there are experts versed in that lore. I used to record all the dreams of the Nupe men with whom I was in daily contact; though they were quite often puzzled about their dreams, they performed sacrifices and so forth only when their dreams referred to dead relatives. Dream interpretation, then, represents another 'supererogatory' element in Nupe religious thought, another 'additional' notion about the meaning of the things in the world, and now one conspicuously treated as such.

Let me add that in other respects, too, the diviner holds no monopoly of prophecy. If he pronounces upon lucky or unlucky days, some knowledge of this kind is common throughout Nupe. Thus two months, the seventh and thirteenth, are held to be unlucky, and people will avoid travelling or having wedding feasts and other celebrations at these times. In all other months certain days are specially lucky—the second, seventh, twelfth, seventeenth and eighteenth day; so is the time of full moon, while moonless days are unlucky and dangerous for all tasks.[1]

If divination and the interpretation of dreams represent supernatural aids which overlap in their efficacy but are of different ease of access, this is true also of the knowledge, shared by everybody, of propitious and unpropitious dates. In other words, for much the same kind of guidance you can rely on your own knowledge, on what you or your friends know about dreams, and on the professional advice of diviners. Once more we note the 'proliferation' of Nupe religious thought and that tendency to multiply the mystic tools, that is, to have 'several strings to one's bow.'

[1] It is usual in Nupe to refer to months and days in this way, by numbers rather than names. The interval of five between the lucky days, incidentally, plays no further part in Nupe thought or religious observances.

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procedure would remain powerless. The notion of a blessing is quite alien to the Nupe: they say 'May God cause so-and-so to happen', not 'May God make our efforts successful'; the prayer simply duplicates the other features in the ritual performance. Nor yet is there any conception of moral worthiness, of 'showing reason' why God should grant success or give his blessing. The paradox remains, and the only way to dissolve it is to call the Nupe ritual a bow with two strings.

This viewpoint fits well into the conceptual framework of Nupe religion, where different rituals and even different forms of supernatural appeal appear as alternatives which may replace each other, one being effective where the other happened to fail. Their possible failure is thus to some extent anticipated. The efficacy of the 'fixed' and more general rituals, especially, may be corrected by that of the 'movable' and more specialized ones. As we know, divination will suggest the suitable alternative, while the wide overlap in the ritual aims makes such choices and changes feasible. There is some hierarchy of power among the rituals, some being definitely 'stronger' than others; nor are they all interchangeable. The supreme or unique rituals, therefore, such as the *gunnu* or *mamma*, may suffer a failure which is irreducible. But even this failure does not assail the confidence that is placed in them; for there are the loopholes which we know well: the ultimate unconcern of the remote deity, and the evil forces he suffers to exist.

The fact that the failures of ritual can in this fashion be explained away does not, however, account for the initial source of the confidence which is thus protected. It might be argued that no special explanatory hypotheses are needed; since people, after all, believe in what they practice, the assurance found in the practice is likely to be implicit already in the belief. Differently expressed, the confidence in the ritual would simply be part of its conceptual content. Undoubtedly, this must be true, in some measure, of all rituals, and wholly true of the movable rituals and all the other casual observances, whose aims are not self-confirming and whose procedure is prosaic and businesslike. Here the rule holds—if you believe, then you will find assurance in the practical application of this belief; if you do not, the practice will carry no conviction; for the application itself offers nothing further in the way of persuasion. The ritual, as it were, draws upon faith but does not add to it, save accidentally, when its professed aim happens to come true.

It is different in the fixed and more elaborate rituals; for here the belief is affirmed by the practice, and the content of the ritual sustained and reinforced by its form. Let me explain this more

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disease, sudden death, misfortune, injustice, that is, by the evil things in the world. Thus in all religions there are attempts to justify or resolve, or to dismiss as merely apparent, this contradiction of promise and fulfilment. The attempts vary in philosophical refinement. The religious doctrine may, in the vein of stoic philosophy, explain the presence of evil as a foil for the visibility of the good; or it can make the evil things, like the sufferings of Job, a touchstone of faith; or it may lay their cause into the imperfection of man, so that his sins (willed or not, actual or intended) are behind the apparent failures of divine providence. Or finally, and more crudely, the religion may contain a loophole within itself, admitting a province where evil is simply allowed to reign. The devil of naïve belief is one embodiment of this loophole-idea; the witch another.

It is true that the belief in the evil actions of witches bears only upon a narrow variety of that abstract 'evil in the world' meant by philosophers or theologians. Even so, the 'loophole' remains. Let us remember also that the belief in witches safeguards itself from being 'found out' and proved or refuted by empirical means; in embracing this incontrovertible belief, then, religious faith itself is safeguarded from being found illusory and refuted by reality. Speaking practically, the acceptance of witchcraft (or of the devil) saves the believer from false hopes or disillusion; speaking philosophically, the acceptance of an ultimate X within the divinely ordered universe saves that order. Admitting that there is a province where the believed-in guidance and protection do not fully reach, we save the belief in laws to guide us and in that promise of protection. Witchcraft, in brief, is a chapter in apologetics, albeit crudely written.

So far my original conclusions (somewhat paraphrased). Now though they are, I believe, correct for other systems of religious belief, they do not seem to apply to Nupe religion. Granting that beliefs in witchcraft can save faith in a divine order of the universe, in Nupe religion, there is nothing of the kind to save; if in other societies or cultures there must be the admission of that ultimate X to account for, or explain away, the failure of religious guidance and promise of protection, in Nupe, this guidance and promise have never been offered. Nupe religion, as we know, admits accidents at every step; it promises only fallible guidance and protection; the observances or ethical rules it upholds are not meant to be counted upon against the many evils which are also in the world—malevolent spirits, diseases, uncontrollable misfortune. Indeed, the deity himself has put them in the world and suffers them to exist, being unconcerned with the fate of his creation. Why, then, should there be this further, special

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assumption of the evil of witchcraft? The problem which it might serve to solve simply does not exist.

Yet there remains another problem, requiring a kindred solution. With the admission of accident, with the conception of an unpredictable and amoral universe, the problem of the presence of evil is solved intellectually or, at least, argued away on the intellectual plane. But this solution leaves an emotional gap. For I hold that there is a deeply seated desire for certainty, which demands satisfaction of an essentially emotional kind, that is, the awareness that the world is not only certain, but concerned with *you*—your fate, your happiness. And where this demand is refused (as in Nupe) anxieties and frustrations must again arise and press for some ab-reaction and solution. But now those other outlets which might relieve the pent-up tension, through random acts of aggression or some explosive catharsis, would prove inadequate; they would take care of the symptoms but not of the conflicts from which these spring. Nor can the disturbance of the longed-for certainty be overcome save by discovering the disturber; the vague dissatisfaction with an abstract state of affairs must be capable of crystallizing into the accusations of concrete agents. Above all, there must be the chance of practical action, so that the people aware of the threat also have the satisfaction of dealing with it. In other words, precisely because you know that the world around you holds out no promise of certainty nor any supreme design, you conjure up an arch-enemy with whom at least you can reckon, on whom you can vent fears and hatreds, and over whom you may hope to triumph, be it Satan or the witch.

The witch is, perhaps, less of an arch-enemy, since only some of the evils of the world can be laid at her doorstep. Yet the conjured-up picture of human beings who are unaccountably evil and unaccountably cause death and disease does take care of a portion of the uncertainty in the world. Now, we previously said that the admission of a province of life where the benevolent design of the universe does not reach saves the faith in that universe: this clearly does not apply. We must now say—the admission of a province of life where malevolent forces can be defined (and attacked), makes it possible to bear a universe devoid of such design. To be sure, this is no longer our 'loophole' theory; but it is as it were its photographic negative, or the same mathematical formula with all pluses changed into minus signs. Crudely speaking, you may have a God of Justice and Mercy, naïvely conceived, and devils or witches in the background; or you may have an Idle God, remotely in the background, but at least devils or witches to grapple with.

That the notion of witchcraft may arise from such opposed con-

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VII

STRANGE GODS

In this chapter I propose to discuss the adoption, by the Nupe, of originally alien beliefs and practices. We shall not be concerned with the pure mechanics of 'borrowing' or 'diffusion'; at least, we shall be concerned only with the motives behind these processes. For we cannot but assume that the adoption of novel or alien elements into any religious system, far from being haphazard, does follow from intelligible motives, which must in turn relevantly bear on the character of the religion and, ultimately, of the whole culture of which it is a part. So that the information so gained will either confirm our interpretation of that character or correct it, bringing to light hitherto unperceived aspects.

This may only be a heuristic assumption to begin with; and other, more specific ones, could at once be added—that the novel features must bear some affinity to the traditional pattern; or that they serve to redress some pre-existing inadequacy; or that they offer a chance of expression to some new trend, say, a changed outlook of the people, which the traditional beliefs and practices failed to satisfy. It must be admitted that in the anthropological field the prerequisite evidence is not easy to procure and that even the first step, the mere discovery of the alien elements, may be difficult or uncertain. Fairly recent additions are usually readily traced; but in the absence of historical records originally alien features long since absorbed may remain unidentifiable. Which proviso holds fully in the case of Nupe religion. Furthermore, the inferences we might draw from our study of 'adoptions' must be corroborated by the appropriate negative evidence, that is, by instances of 'rejection'. But though here we are likely to meet with further technical difficulties, mainly because there might be no record of the rejected chances, the situation in Nupe does afford relevant evidence of this kind. It lies in the religious observances practised by close neighbours of the Nupe or by immigrant groups in their midst, with which the Nupe people are fully familiar, yet which they did not choose to adopt or imitate. Finally, the adoption of alien features, or indeed of a whole alien creed, may conceivably have taken place under pressure; in which

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case none of our assumptions would apply, or would apply without considerable qualifications. Again, the situation is simplified in Nupe; for only in the case of Islam was the adoption of the alien creed backed by social and political pressure; all other adoptions (or rejections) were spontaneous and voluntary. Let us make this aspect our starting point and begin with a brief outline of the chances of this nature that were offering to the Nupe.

I. ADOPTIONS AND REJECTIONS

The southern neighbours of the Nupe, the Yoruba, possess a religious system which contains many features diametrically opposed to those characterizing Nupe religion. Yoruba religion is based upon a pantheon of deities, all anthropomorphously conceived, who severally govern the universe. Each deity has his (or her) definite sphere—the sky, thunder, rain, land, sea, forests, animals, fishes, crops, special diseases, special skills, divination, and so forth; so that the universe is as it were split up and departmentalized in detailed fashion. The deities are served by a number of specialized orders of priesthood; they are represented, with beautiful realism, in bronze, wood, terracotta, and stone; and masked dances and ritual drama, employing again realistic likenesses, play a prominent part in all Yoruba cults. As has been mentioned, the average Nupe is familiar with the main features of Yoruba religion. Not only has he encountered them on his many travels, but in the area west and south of the Niger Nupe and Yoruba settlements are interspersed, and in certain cases even joined together in twin villages (as in Shari or Shonga). Above all, since 1860 or thereabouts colonies of Yoruba known as *Konú* have been settled in numerous villages of Nupe country, where they form well-defined sections and specialize in their traditional crafts of weaving and indigo dyeing. Though today wholly 'Nupe-ized' in language and mode of life, they still publicly perform one of their masked ceremonies, the *egungun*, known as *gugu* to the Nupe, which serves both as a funeral rite and as an annual ritual safeguarding fertility and well-being. The northern and north-eastern districts of Nupe are conquered territory, inhabited by people of Gwari extraction, who came under Nupe domination in the last hundred years and are still referred to as 'Gwari slaves'. Their traditional culture must have closely resembled that of Nupe, while an effective process of Nupe-ization has obliterated most of the differences that did exist. But a few sections of the Gwari-Nupe have preserved a cult alien to Nupe practice; it is called *sogba* and is concerned with childbirth and the cure of barrenness, with the conviction and punishment of

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criminals, and with the special burial rites for people killed by lightning. Again, there is a large and influential colony of Hausa in the capital Bida. These immigrants too have kept alive one of their typical cults, the *bori*, which they stage publicly in the streets and squares of the town. Another group of immigrants settled around Kutigi, in the centre of Nupe country, towards the end of the eighteenth century; they were Mohammedans hailing from Bornu and brought with them one of their traditional ceremonials, the *gani*, which contains several features strikingly 'un-Nupe' in character.

All these, then, were potential models for the Nupe to follow; as we shall see, the Nupe reaction towards them was neither uniform nor, at first sight at least, consistent.

(i) *The Hausa Bori*

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To begin with a clear case of 'rejection'. It is represented in the *bori* cult, which can at once be described as utterly uncongenial to Nupe religious conceptions. It is based upon the shamanistic idea of spirit possession, revealed in hysterical or cataleptic fits and in trance states, when the person so affected is believed to speak with the voice of a spirit and to behave like one. These states may occur spontaneously or may be artificially induced, especially by the use of music, which is again distinctly foreign to Nupe, employing the monotonous, arhythmic playing of a single-string fiddle. When spontaneous, the fits or trance states are regarded as spirit-caused mental disorders, while the induced states are regarded both as therapeutic measures and as means of spirit control in general. The 'theory' behind the cult is briefly this. There exists a wide variety of spirits (*aljannu*), some benevolent, others evil, each bearing a special name and character, and revealing itself in the particular gestures, gait and voice exhibited by the possessed person. Each spirit also has a tune and dance step peculiar to it, and one believes that the playing of the tune and the performance of the dance both evoke the spirit in normal individuals and placate and control it in those 'possessed'. Any person exhibiting the spirit-caused disorders is therefore placed under the observation of a cult member, who is expected to identify the spirit, and to placate and exorcise it. The latter act does not mean the final departure of the spirit; the aim is, rather, to bring the spirit 'visits' under control, so that they materialize only when evoked in the *bori* dances but do not otherwise threaten the human host. Each person so cured becomes a member of the *bori* cult; but many others will try to join it without this particular qualification, seeking the occasional trance induced in the *bori* dances. The *bori* cult thus has its own society, which is loosely organized (though

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it has a number of officials of varying rank) and is constantly enlarged through the inclusion of 'cured' patients and of those 'normal' individuals who have been successful in soliciting the 'spirit possession'.

There is no secrecy about the cult and its dance performances; they are staged at frequent intervals, both in private houses and in public, and are always watched by interested Nupe crowds. But no Nupe will join in the dances or has ever entered the society. Note that the cult thus rejected revolves upon a 'treatment' of mental derangements, of diseases, that is, for which Nupe therapeutic art admits to have no reliable remedy. Yet, though always ready to experiment with new cures, neither the Nupe public nor the medicine experts have been persuaded by the *borí*. Admittedly, the *borí* is not simply another cure or remedy: it involves the wholly strange experience of auto-suggestion and hysterical abandonment or ecstasis. It equally involves, on the intellectual plane, the acceptance of new premisses (the detailed spirit universe). But as we shall see from our next example, a somewhat similar intellectual readjustment did in fact occur in the case of another alien cult and 'cure'.

(ii) *The Sogba Cult*

This cult occurs among a section of the Gwari who call themselves Gwari-Basa and live near Wushishi, to the north of Nupe, and also in a number of villages belonging to the conquered, Nupeized parts of Gwari country. Its name, *sogba*, means 'lightning', both in Gwari and Nupe. The cult is widely known also in other parts of Nupe country, and is everywhere regarded as alien, in spite of certain obvious 'Nupeisms'.[1] The name for the hereditary priest, for example, is *Žigí*, while the Gwari priests bear different names, and the whole cult is called a *kuti*, which is once more not Gwari nomenclature. In its more elaborate form the *sogba* cult culminates in an annual communal ceremony, fixed for the 2nd or 7th month, at which the men sacrifice a dog in great secrecy and the women sing and dance, carrying iron rods with bells closely resembling the *sãyi* of the *ndakó gboyá*.[2] The cult further includes a small-scale ritual of the movable type, performed by the priest at the request of clients, both fellow villagers and strangers.

These *ad hoc* ministrations are invoked for one of two reasons,

[1] It is not certain that the cult is in fact of Gwari origin; according to some informants it came originally from Yagba (a southern section of the Yoruba), and has been brought to Gwari and Nupe by immigrants from that country.

[2] This annual ritual was absent in the place I visited, Wushishi, its sketchy description being derived from verbal information only. The account that follows, however, is based on direct observation.

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either to procure the fertility of childless women or to bring about the punishment of offenders, especially of thieves, whose identity is unknown. In either event a small payment in kolanuts and money is made to the priest. The ritual involves the use of a special cult object unknown in the rest of Nupe; it consists of a forked wooden post, cut from a certain tree in such a manner that it resembles a 'tree cut in two by lightning' and planted in the ground in the priest's house, either inside a hut or in the open. Around the foot of the post there are a number of flat, black, polished stones which are described as 'thunderbolts' (*sogba* or *sokógba*). Nothing is known about the origin of the stones save that some had been collected by the grandfather of the present priest and others inherited from more distant ancestors. The priest also owns a few of the bell-rods mentioned before and a *cigbe* shrine containing a nameless 'medicine'.

The client is made to sit in a hut away from the scene of the actual rite, which is executed by the priest and two assistants (his sons or brothers). The priest crouches in front of the forked post, his assistants standing on his right and left, each gripping one of the branches of the fork. The priest pours a little beer on the 'thunderbolts' and on the ground, and briefly and informally invokes the *kuti*, explaining the nature of the request. The operative phrase is—'*Sogba*, may the woman bear a child', or—'*Sogba*, may the evil person (for example, the thief) be killed'. If the aim of the rite is to procure childbirth, the priest afterwards goes to the woman, touches her with one of the bell-rods and gives her a little of the *cigbe*, which she must drink daily for four days. The barren woman will then hope to bear a child; and the person who had suffered injury at the hands of an unknown culprit will be assured that the latter will be killed by lightning—not at once or within a definite period, but surely some time in the future. The latter notion bears on a final duty of the *sogba* priest, which is to bury all persons killed by lightning and to perform the appropriate rites for these victims of divine punishment.

The children born after the intercession of the *kuti sogba* are tied to the cult for life. Immediately after the birth of the child the *Žigí* must be informed, so that he may in turn 'inform the *kuti*' by means of another sacrifice. Afterwards the *Žigí* presents the infant with a special charm in the form of a tiny dagger, which the child (and later the grown person) must always wear around the neck. Invariably, the child is given the name *Sogba*, and is generally referred to as *egi sogba*, 'child of *Sogba*'. If such a child falls ill, his parents will seek help, not from some other *kuti* or from professional medicine-men, but again from the *Žigí*, who does not charge for this further assistance: the child thus remains

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the responsibility of the *sogba* cult. Also, when such children grow up and marry they will as a matter of course invoke the *sogba* sacrifice, so that their union might be similarly blessed. The same idea, of the special protection enjoyed by *sogba* children, is expressed in this at first glance incongruous fashion: *sogba* children, even as adults, may help themselves with impunity to food and things of small value from any trader on the market. If we call this practice a 'licensed theft', we can see an oblique logical connection between this impunity and that other function of the cult, the punishment of thieves.

So much for the observances in the Gwari (or Nupe-Gwari) communities. The Nupe attitude towards the cult as such and towards the annual ceremonial is one of mild curiosity or indifference: they are, for the Nupe, merely the peculiar customs of 'foreigners'. Nor has the use of the *sogba* ritual for the purpose of inflicting supernatural punishment spread to the rest of the country. This may seem puzzling; for though the Nupe have their own ordeals to bring to justice criminals who deny their guilt, this method can only be applied when suspicion has already fastened upon a person; and though the Nupe possess their deadly *cigbe* against burglars and evil-wishers, these act merely as means of protection which must be acquired beforehand. As for the magic punishment of unknown offenders after the event, the supernatural armoury of Nupe appears to lack such means. Even so, this aspect of the *sogba* cult has not been utilized. I can suggest only this reason: such punishments after the event, placed within the power of the wronged person, come very close to personal vengeance; which is utterly foreign to the legal conceptions of the Nupe. As their elaborate judicial machinery precludes all secular self-help, so it would seem to preclude also this option of supernatural vengeance.

At the same time the Nupe in the neighbourhood of villages possessing the *sogba* cult claim that they now call in the *sogba* priest to bury persons killed by lightning. Since this obviously happens only rarely, the practice can have no great weight in the religious life of the people; nor can I be certain that it is followed regularly. Yet several Nupe sections, and not only those which have adopted this special burial custom, also share, if more vaguely, the Gwari belief that death by lightning may be a punishment for theft.[1] The Nupe who adopted the burial custom, then, have seized upon a religious practice which seemed to fit conveniently their own mystic ideas or fears.

The most thorough adoption concerns the use of the *sogba* ritual as a remedy for barrenness. Numerous Nupe women, from

[1] See above, p. 33.

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communities all over the country, have made the pilgrimage to the nearest shrine and priest, and numerous persons, both young and old, bear the tell-tale name *Sogba*. The degree to which the alien cult has taken root is best seen from a text on the practices surrounding childbirth which I recorded in Bida long before I knew anything about the *sogba* cult, and which contains this straightforward statement:

'If a woman has no child and she is a pagan, she would go and visit the place of *sogba*, she would go and pray for a child. The pagans have a hut with a *kuti* inside. The priest will translate (talk to the *kuti*) on behalf of the woman or man who come to visit the *sogba*. The priest receives money from the person who comes. If God agrees and that person has a child, it will be named *Sogba*. It will wear a charm round his neck, everybody seeing that person will know that he is a child of *sogba*.'

The traditional religious or quasi-religious practices of Nupe certainly do not lack 'cures' of sterility. If here a further magic treatment has been added to the numerous existing ones, this would seem to bear out the ever-visible desire for children. Nor do the religious conceptions of the people, which so readily allow for alternative practices and several trials, conflict with the desire behind this addition. But let us note this. Though the Nupe make use only of one particular feature or benefit of the alien cult and disregard its wider context (of which, in fact, they are mostly ignorant), this piecemeal adoption yet commits them to a radically changed outlook. For they accept, with the miraculous powers of *sogba*, also the tie forged between these powers and the beneficiary. And this whole idea, that an ordinary person can for life be dedicated to a *kuti* and stand under its protection, has no parallel in Nupe religion. The practical consequences of this dedication are neither burdensome nor very important; even so, they clash with the conventional way of looking at 'medicines' or *ad hoc* rituals as at so many expedients, solicited when one needs them, paid for, and then forgotten.

(iii) *Yoruba Influences*

Yoruba religion, the third on our list, has hardly touched Nupe. The elaborate cosmology of the Yoruba, their pantheon, and their effigies or idols had no influence upon the beliefs and practices of the Nupe. Nor has the *gugu* cult of the Yoruba settlers in Nupe found any response other than detached or amused interest.

There seem to be two exceptions. The first is exemplified in the bronze figures on Jebba Island which have been accepted as sacred

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effigies and cult objects.[1] It is unlikely, incidentally, that these figures are Yoruba in origin; but they are of the same kind as the effigies of deities worshipped by the Yoruba. Now, the Nupe do not regard their figures as representations of deities; indeed the whole question, what or whom they represent, evokes no great interest. For the Nupe, the figures are merely 'likenesses' of a man and a woman (who is sometimes called the man's mother) and, more importantly, relics of Tsoede. Their possession is understood to be exceptional and indeed unique; and even though they figure prominently in one of the Jebba rituals, they do not add anything relevant to the purely religious conceptions. The images are simply the unusual objects of an unusual, 'royal' cult, but not more magically effective or possessed of special meaning because they happen to be shaped in human likeness.

The second exception is more important. In Mokwa and one or two villages in the river valley, we meet with a masked dance called *elo* (a meaningless word in Nupe), which is quite unlike any Nupe dance or ritual.[2] It does, however, somewhat resemble the Yoruba *gugu*, which equally occurs in Mokwa, not only in its paraphernalia but also in certain gestures and motions of the dancers. The *elo* dancers wear long-sleeved hoods of coloured cloth cut like those worn in the *gugu* and cover their faces with coloured wooden masks, carved in grotesquely human features and surmounted by horns. The masks resemble those of the *gugu* only in that both are meant to represent a human face; but in the *gugu* the design is produced by cowrie shells sewn on to the cloth, while the *elo* type is reminiscent rather of the masks used by the southernmost sections of the Yoruba, or by the Ibo and other tribes in Southern Nigeria. The people who perform the *elo* know little about the origin of the masks or, indeed, of the whole ceremonial. It is said that Tsoede brought it from the south and established it in certain villages of his small river kingdom 'because he liked the dance so much that he wanted to see it again and again'. The masks now used are the work of the wood-carvers of Shonga (a mixed Yoruba-Nupe village on the Niger), though this particular skill has since disappeared; one or two masks are quite recent, having been made by a craftsman at Rabah who has preserved the old art. The hoods of cloth, on the other hand, are an innovation; in the youth of one

[1] As has been mentioned, similar figures, though both smaller and cruder, are found in Tada, another riverain village. What is said here about the Jebba figures equally applies to the Tada 'idols'.

[2] I recorded the *elo* in Mokwa, in Rabah (a few miles away on the river) and in Gbajibo, north of Jebba. In addition, smaller villages and hamlets in the neighbourhood, which do not themselves possess the *elo* masks, perform the dance annually with masks borrowed from Mokwa.

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of my Mokwa informants, a man of about sixty, the *elo* dancers used to wear skirts and cloaks made of dried grass, probably like those worn in the *mamma* ritual of Jebba; it was only later that the cloth hoods were adopted, 'because they looked nicer'. I have no doubt that they were modelled on the almost identical dress of the *gugu* dancers, with which the Mokwa people at least are so thoroughly familiar. They themselves disclaim any such connection, which is admittedly not borne out by any other features of the two cults.

Granting the alien origin of the *elo*, we must add that it has been fairly thoroughly Nupe-ized. To begin with, it has taken its place among the 'fixed' ceremonials, being performed annually in the 9th month (in Mokwa and Rabah) or 6th month (in Gbajibo). Like the other Nupe ceremonials, the *elo* is in the charge of one of the titled elders, whose office includes the responsibility for the annual performance and the tuition of the dancers. The most important mask, called *elokó* ('Great *elo*'), is also stored in his house, while the other masks and dresses are kept in the houses of other rankholders. When the masks appear in the dance they are addressed, in Nupe fashion, by a special salute, *eluló* ('Bird of *elo*'); the songs are in Nupe, the style of the music and most dance steps are typically Nupe, as are also the drums which are played throughout the dance.[1] But the dance performance itself has retained its uncommon character. All the dancers are men; but among them are three, wearing highly ornamented masks with curved twin horns, who are said to represent 'female' figures, the mask of the 'Great *elo*' belonging to this category. Two other dancers, wearing hoods pulled over their faces and head-dresses of feathers, are described as 'male'. Two more figures, wearing simple masks surmounted by one straight horn, are called *gara* (lit. 'robber'). These last figures are perhaps the most unusual; for while the 'male' and 'female' masks stalk about, or jump and dance much as do ordinary dancers or the masks in the *ndakó gboyá* and *mamma*, the *gara* plays the part of a bogey-man who frightens the children, and of a clown whose pranks delight old and young; which double role is otherwise unknown in Nupe dance ceremonial. The behaviour of the 'male' and 'female' masks, incidentally, is in no way suggestive of this ascription of sex. In addition, there are two unmasked young men who join in the dancing and clowning and wear fringed skirts made of leopard skin, their bare legs being painted with white spots ('like the spots of leopards')—another conspicuously non-Nupe feature.

The most incongruous aspect of the *elo* lies in its purpose, or

[1] The *elo* includes only one musical instrument uncommon in Nupe, an iron double-bell, beaten with a stick.

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rather in its absence of purpose. Although it has a definite date like other rituals and although the masks must dress in secrecy, there is nothing sacred about the performance. No sacrifice or ritual preparations precede or accompany it; and the *elo* is positively stated to be nothing like a *kuti*, but merely *dzodzo*, 'play'. The dance seems to contain the remnants of some plot or dramatic theme; the various roles of 'male' and 'female' figures and of 'clowns' or 'robbers' can suggest nothing else. But again, the people deny that there is such a plot or that these 'roles' have any meaning. The *elo* songs, certainly, betray none. Here are a few of them, each consisting of a brief line which is endlessly repeated throughout the corresponding phase of the dance.

Zwákule, zwákule (meaningless).
I am calling Kolo (a name, here applied to *elo*),
he is coming slowly.
The *elo* matures every year.
They are calling Kolo, he swings his leg,
ebi du, ebi du (meaningless).
Every year we are making *elo*.
The *gara* appears, there is his face.

In a sense, the *elo* is a mixture of ritual and entertainment. But unlike the usual Nupe ceremonial, in which the ritual part precedes the 'play', the *elo* involves ritual only as it were in its administration (in the fixed date, the secret dressing-up of the actors, the formal apportionment of relevant duties); the rest is pure entertainment. Perhaps, in its original form, the *elo* was more fully a ceremonial, with some religious purpose as well as a plot. But even this the Nupe would deny; for although they sanctify the practice by ascribing it, in familiar manner, to the ancestor king, they impute to him no reasons other than (we might say) aesthetic ones. Nor have these reasons quite ceased to work. At the Bida *salla* in 1936 I saw a dancer with an unusual headdress which I had never seen before, neither at the previous *salla* nor on other occasions. The dancer himself was one of the *sorogi* dancers mentioned in a previous context;[1] but on his head he wore a brass cap with two horns. Subsequent enquiries elicited the fact that the headdress had been made by a Bida brass-smith to the specifications of the dancer: and the latter had meant to copy the horns of the *elo* masks which he had seen and admired in Mokwa.

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(iv) *The Gani of Kutigi*

I have elsewhere described this cult and the manner in which it took root in Kutigi and the adjacent communities, so that I need

[1] See above, p. 188.

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only summarize the salient facts.[1] Unlike the *elo*, the *gani* can clearly be traced to its alien origin, and its importation into Nupe, by Moslem immigrants from the north, can even be dated with fair accuracy (having occurred probably about 1760–70). The Moslem character of the ceremonial is visible, above all, in the esoteric part, which takes the form of a symbolic burial in the Mohammedan manner; it is further emphasized by the often voiced claim that the whole ceremonial represents an observance of Islam, namely, the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet—a claim which has little validity.[2] Even so, the *gani* has been firmly adopted also by the pagan population and, what is more important, has been adopted as a ritual or at least as a ceremonial of serious and sacred import. Yet in calling the *gani* a ritual or ceremonial I am stating my own conclusions, couched in our conventional terminology. The Nupe have no suitable name for this performance which has many aspects of a ritual act without conforming to a 'ritual' as the pagans understand it. They all emphasize that it is not a *kuti*; but neither do they call it *dzodzo*, mere 'play', in spite of the great scope given to mummery, display, crude pranks, and merry-making generally. They either use the non-committal term *nya'nya*, 'dancing', or simply argue that 'the *gani* is the *gani*', that is, unlike any other tribal festivity. Linguistic usage, it seems, has not quite caught up with this novel and ambiguous species of ceremonial.

The *gani* ceremonial has for its main theme the periodical reconstitution of the village age-grade associations, that is, the acceptance of novices into the first grade and the promotion of older boys and youths to higher grades. These corporate promotions go hand in hand with a reshuffling of the various ranks held in each age-grade association, and hence with an upgrading or downgrading of its members. If the age grades thus appear dominated by competition and the notions of rank and career, they merely mirror as well as anticipate interests paramount in Nupe political life. As I phrased it elsewhere, age-grade life serves as an 'education for citizenship';[3] and this aspect too is given expression in the *gani* ceremonial, together with other ideas of more general import, bearing on growth and maturity.

In the ceremonial each age grade is assigned a specific role, acting under its leader, who bears the title *Ndakotsu*—'Grandfather of

[1] See 'The Gani Ritual of Nupe', *Africa*, vol. XIX, 1949.

[2] This is clearly shown by the discrepancy in the dates. The Birth of the Prophet (*Ma'ulid*) falls on the twelfth day of the first lunar month of the Mohammedan calendar (in 1934 the 29th March), while the *gani* celebrations start on the tenth day of the 4th month in Nupe reckoning (in 1934, the 25th June).

[3] See *A Black Byzantium*, pp. 383 *et seq.*

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771 177 561 the king'. Thus led, the age grades walk in procession through the village to salute the chief and all the other notables of the community, join in the dancing, engage in wrestling matches, and meet one another in a realistic 'battle', to be described presently. The esoteric rite of the *gani*, the 'burial service' mentioned before, is performed by the leaders alone, in a secret place away from the scene of the public festivities. The younger boys are all dressed up as girls and imitate, in exaggerated and ridiculous fashion, the walk and dance steps of the women. This masquerade, though highly elaborate and considered a most relevant aspect of the celebration, is not further explained; but the context makes it clear that it carries the same meaning of a change of roles which underlies the similar mummery of the *gunnu*.[1] For this meaning is again expressed, now by means of a conspicuous symbolism which everyone understands, in certain other episodes of the *gani*, meant to dramatize the admission of the novices and the various promotions from grade to grade. There is the 'death and burial', loudly mourned by the crowd, of a 'little girl', indicating the abandonment of infancy by the young boys about to enter the first grade. In a preceding phase a 'little boy' is similarly buried and mourned, that is, shown to abandon boyhood for adolescence. Lastly, the youths of the most senior grade appear dressed up as 'warriors' and 'horsemen', meeting their juniors in a mock battle which seems to symbolize the final stage of adolescence, when youth must hold its own against adults, compete and struggle with them, and break into their ranks. All these things actually happen in the 'battle', whose very realism seems symbolic of the severe competition for position and power which characterizes Nupe life. In brief, the *gani* ceremonial is a typical *rite de passage*, dramatizing the crucial phases of male adolescence and adoption into manhood. Seen against this background, an ususual feature of the *gani*, too, falls into place. Obscene sexual jokes and allusions, normally never used, appear in the *gani* songs and are freely bandied about during the festivities, both by old and young: we may conclude that they serve to throw into relief a final aspect of adolescence, sexual maturity.

771 177 786 561 The ceremonial lasts three days, and each day concludes with a hectic dance in which the sexes meet in utterly unrestrained fashion. Nor does this unrestraint end with the dance; for during the three nights all the normal rules of sex morality are in abeyance. This temporary abandonment of moral restraint, which applies to every person in the community, implies, of course, more than merely a symbolic reference to adolescence and sexual maturity. It represents one of those periodical concessions to moral

[1] See above, p. 113.

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or sexual licence which are familiar from many societies, primitive and advanced. We know that they occur also in the traditional annual celebration of the *gunnu*. And here it seems significant that the people of Kutigi and the other communities now performing the *gani* have abandoned the *gunnu* in this fixed, annual form.[1] Whatever other reasons have contributed to the abandonment of the annual *gunnu*, the fact that it shared with the *gani* this one feature may well have been decisive; for it would seem to be in the very nature of this concession to unrestraint that it must not be duplicated.

There is evidence to show that the sexual licence belonged to the *gani* already in its original form in which it reached Nupe country. This original *gani* equally included some connection, apparently broad and unspecific, with age-grade life and male adolescence.[2] To some extent, then, the Nupe found in the *gani* a cult fortuitously congenial to their own interests and ideas. But let us note that the *gani* expresses them with unaccustomed sharpness: the masquerade of boys as girls, sketchily treated in the *gunnu*, is fully exploited in the *gani*; and nowhere else is age-grade life dramatized with such effect.

Other 'Nupeisms' in the *gani* are clearly the result of adaptation and remodelling. Thus, though the ceremonial retained its original name, its songs and prayers are in Nupe; the latter, spoken at the secret 'burial service', conclude with the typical Nupe formula—'May the whole town have health'; the musical instruments, the music itself, the dance steps, and the whole design of the ceremonial, with an esoteric part preceding the public 'merry-making'—all these are taken from the traditional practice. Yet equally, the *gani* contains conspicuously novel and 'un-Nupe' features. The very notion of a ceremonial having a proper plot and being staged as a drama with consecutive scenes has no parallel in Nupe. The same is true of the precise symbolism of the *gani* and of the masquerade of warriors and horsemen: the latter, incidentally, appear as riders of hobby-horses, which mummery is equally unknown in the rest of Nupe. So are the standards with which the age grades parade during the ceremonial, some of which are combined with crude symbols of the sexes. The open eroticism of the *gani*, finally, contrasts strikingly with the normal mood of Nupe ceremonials.

[1] See above, p. 83. It will be remembered that the performance of the *gunnu* as a movable rite (which is still practised in Kutigi) does not include the 'mixed' dance and the period of erotic licence.

[2] The evidence in question is based on accounts of the *gani* celebrations in its country of origin and among the nomadic Fulani. See *Africa*, vol. XIX, 1949, p. 177, n. 2.

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Let me stress that the 'congenial' aspects of the *gani* did not cause it to be simply accepted into the ceremonial repertoire of Nupe; nor do its 'uncongenial' features represent merely unassimilated remnants. In a sense both such a straightforward acceptance and complete assimilation were precluded by the circuitous manner in which the *gani* was adopted and which was meant to preserve rather than to obliterate its alien character. Here I must explain that the community where the *gani* took root represents, on a small scale, a composite or 'plural' society. It is composed of three distinct sections—the Bornu immigrants (called *Benu*); a group of hereditary hunters (*ndaceži*); and a group claiming the status of aboriginal inhabitants and calling themselves 'Owners of the Land' (*kintsoži*). In this heterogeneous community the alien provenance of the *gani* ceremonial remained intact; its esoteric rites are performed only by members of the immigrant group, and the whole *gani* is still, for the people of Kutigi, an observance unequivocally 'belonging to' or 'owned' by that section, even though all others join in the public celebrations. They in turn remained the 'owners' of their own traditional cults, the *žikinta* (performed by the group of hunters) and the *gunnu* (performed, as a movable rite, by the *kintsoži*). But in performing its proper ceremonial each congregation acts on behalf of the whole composite community; and all three ceremonials are considered indispensable, in a supernatural sense and in their diverse ways, for the well-being of that wider group. The *gani*, therefore, came to be adopted, not through simply diffusing to the other sections, but through being acknowledged by them as a vital contribution which its 'owners' can make to the common weal. The sectional 'ownership', in other words, was transformed into a sectional 'task', and the divided congregation, into a religious division of labour.[1]

It is clear that this manner of adoption is adjusted to the particular problems of a 'plural society', helping to maintain or buttress its precarious, divided unity. And other societies, facing the same problems, have evolved much the same solution. Yet though the religious division of labour has this very wide application, it may be pointed out that, in Nupe, it remains 'congenial' to the character of the religious system; for it only develops further the ideas underlying Nupe priestship and the Nupe form of ritual, 'owned' by kin groups but operating for the 'common weal'.

[1] Let me note briefly that the same conception reappears, somewhat modified, in the attitude of the Nupe people at large towards the *gani*, which they regard as the 'possession' of the people of Kutigi. This aspect, which has been fully treated in the article mentioned above, is not relevant to the present discussion.

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2. ON MOTIVES

We turn to our crucial problem, the motives underlying these adoptions and rejections of alien observances. Since in our examples both responses were voluntary, not imposed by extraneous pressure or constraint, we may legitimately argue that the acceptance must have rested upon some appeal, some kind of pull, which the novel practice exercised upon the recipients-to-be, and the rejection upon the lack of such an appeal or perhaps its opposite. This 'appeal' or 'pull' is clearly a complex thing. First and foremost, it is a pull of interest; in other words, we may search for some specific interest or 'need' pre-existing in the recipient culture, which the novel practice seems capable (or incapable) of satisfying.[1] The relevant factor, however, is not the pre-existing interest or need as such, but a residual interest or need; what we must show is not so much that the society is deeply concerned over such-and-such issues (for example, the fecundity of women) but that this concern is unsatisfied even where it is met by pre-existing institutions. The *gugu* ceremonial, for example, answers interests strongly pronounced in Nupe life in the fixed rituals promising communal well-being, and in the ritualization of death; but since a series of traditional ceremonials profess the same aims, the residual interest must be small, if it is felt at all. The concern over childbirth, on the other hand, is by its nature such that it would always remain active and press for additional promises or safeguards.

The concern or aim of the alien observance may obviously be expressed in a form more or less novel and unprecedented; and the degree of novelty must clearly itself affect the ease of adoption. But this effect is difficult to assess. Often, we shall no doubt argue that, the more novel a practice, the more uncongenial must it be to people still thinking in terms of traditional ways of acting; so that the novelty would act as a brake upon the free play of interests, as a counter-pull as it were. Yet we cannot exclude the possibility that the novelty of the practice will help rather than hinder the adoption; for its 'uncongenial' form may itself correspond to some pre-existing interest, that is, to a diffuse desire for unusual and unprecedented experiences. Now all the alien religious practices which the Nupe have adopted contain some 'uncongenial' or unprecedented features. Shall we then say that the latter must have exercised a certain appeal in their own right? Perhaps—though

[1] The term 'pre-existing' is here used in a somewhat loose sense, without the implication of precise chronological evidence. It implies, however, that the interest or need in question can be established independently, that is, can be shown to obtain apart from the adopted (or rejected) practice.

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771 177 782 the same lack of congeniality also characterizes the practices which have been rejected. Or shall we assume that, for the adoption to occur, the pre-existing interest must have outweighed the uncongenial character, while in the case of rejected practices the balance was the other way? There is evidence for this. The *gani*, with all its alien elements, clearly answers powerful pre-existing interests, and indeed improves upon the respective traditional institutions; the *gugu*, conversely, has nothing of the kind to offer: it is only another fixed ritual, duplicating the aims of the traditional rites, so that, apart from being uncongenial in form, it also appears redundant in content. The *bori* could answer at least a weak pre-existing need, since it offers a cure for lunacy of which the Nupe are deficient; yet it also clashes utterly with their religious beliefs and, above all, with the psychological tenor of their religious life. The *sogba* cult seems to exemplify this balance between interest and congeniality even more clearly. For the Nupe adopted only that aspect of it which corresponds to a strongly pronounced and in a sense inexhaustible interest (in fecundity), while rejecting both the annual ceremonial, whose aims seem redundant, and the *sogba* ordeal, which was altogether alien to the pre-existing aims or interests. Much the same is true of the bronze figures of Tsoede, which were embodied in Nupe ritual only as emblems of kingship, without any of the features normally implicit in the worship of 'idols'.

Let us be clear that this assessment of a balance between interests and congeniality holds only with two provisos. First, it is largely based on *ex post facto* arguments. The *gani*, for example, fits a 'pre-existing need' only in the form in which it exists today. If we judge this affinity of interest to be sufficiently great to have outweighed the uncongenial features we do so because in the event the latter proved no insuperable obstacle; but we cannot be certain how much remodelling, of content and purpose as well as of form, has gone into the acceptance. Nor can we say that the *bori* or *gugu* would have proved incapable of such remodelling. All we can really say is that no such attempts have been made. Have they not been made because there was no sufficiently strong interest to make the effort worthwhile? Again we can only answer—perhaps; for the *elo* would seem to contradict this argument. There, an uncongenial practice has been fitted into Nupe life for no apparent 'need' at all, unless we are prepared to consider the addition of a pleasurable (and novel) occasion a felt 'need'. And if we do so, the mummery of the *gugu* and the unusual dance of the *bori* would seem similarly acceptable.

Secondly, our arguments hold only if other factors in the situation can safely be neglected; and of one of these, the relationship

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between the potential donors and recipients, this cannot be assumed *ab initio*. Rather, this factor must be added as a likely third determinant of adoption or rejection. Surveying our data from this new angle we meet with a wide variety of situations. The *elo*, the Tsoede 'idols', and the *sogba* cult were adopted strictly from outside, without any corresponding fusion or integration of the 'owners' with the recipient groups. But here a further distinction must be drawn: while the Tsoede idols and the *elo* were taken over from fully distinct and in fact unknown donors, the *sogba* was found among neighbours and was 'taken over' only in the sense in which people turn to some promising, if otherwise unfamiliar, place of pilgrimage. Furthermore, the 'owners' of the *sogba* cult, viewed with Nupe eyes, occupied the inferior position of a conquered 'slave' population. Perhaps, then, the barrier of status was readily overcome only in the case of the fertility ritual, with its strong affinity of interest, while in the case of the other aspects of the cult it added to the 'counter-pulls' which made for their rejection.

The *gani*, *gugu*, and *bori* represent observances adopted or rejected in circumstances which involved the fusion or integration of donor and recipient groups. But again, the conditions differ in relevant respects. The Bornu and Yoruba immigrants arrived *en bloc*, maintained themselves as compact groups, and were thus integrated, as segments, in the host communities; the Hausa colony in the cosmopolitan city grew haphazardly, as the result of the irregular immigration of individuals of all classes and occupations, and never achieved internal cohesion; it only fused amorphously with the host community, but was not integrated in it. The kind of adoption, therefore, which turned the *gani* into a 'sectional task' was neither feasible nor called for in the case of the *bori*. It might, on the other hand, conceivably have worked in the case of the Yoruba ritual, even though this cult answers no 'residual' need. But here we must consider that the Yoruba came to Nupe, not as immigrants claiming equal status (as did the Benu), nor yet as free immigrants, but as prisoners of war freed and settled by royal command. Whatever the effect of the other 'pulls' in this rank-conscious society, the barrier of status must have weighed heavily on the side of rejection. Admittedly, it did so effectively only as regards the cult as such; minor features, such as the dress of the dancers which reappears in the *elo*, were adopted across the barrier, for their aesthetic attraction and novelty. Yet the barrier has at least prevented this 'borrowing' being acknowledged.

In brief, the acceptance or rejection of the alien observances involves the efficacy of several conditions and results from their

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varying combination and interplay. I have tried to tabulate the relevant data in the form of a synoptic chart capable of exhibiting the multiple correlations. The features listed are those discussed above, plus and minus signs indicating their presence and absence respectively. I also attempted to grade the interests satisfied by the various cults by doubling the plus signs in the appropriate cases; a similar grading of 'congeniality' seemed irrelevant in the light of the final result.

	(I) *Integration of donors and recipients*	(SD) *Status distinction operating against donors*	(C) *Congeniality of form*	(SI) *Satisfaction of interest*	*Outcome*
bori	−	±	−	+ (as therapeutic measure)	Rejection
gugu	+	+	−	+ ? (pleasurable novelty)	Rejection
gani sogba	+	−	−	++	Adoption
(fertility cult)	−	+	−	++	Adoption
(general cult)	−	+	−	−	Rejection
elo	−	−	−	+ ? (pleasurable novelty)	Adoption
Tsoede idols	−	−	−	++	Adoption

In other words, adoption (of a voluntary kind) occurred when

$$I^{\pm} \ldots SD^{\pm} \ldots C^{-} \ldots SI^{++}$$

and when

$$I^{-} \ldots SD^{-} \ldots C^{-} \ldots SI^{+}.$$

That a strong interest should outweigh the absence of congeniality and render the factor of integration irrelevant is hardly surprising; but it is puzzling that this should be true also where the interest appears to be small and even uncertain (as in the *elo*). Perhaps, then, we have underrated the residual 'need'? If so, it must have sprung from some inadequacy in the pleasures and excitements afforded in the pre-existing situation. Although this

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assumption cannot, for obvious reasons be fully substantiated, it is not altogether unwarranted. Mokwa and the other communities practising the *elo* are in fact poor in ceremonials offering, apart from occasions for worship, also the purely pleasurable stimulations of dancing, singing, and conviviality; for while most Nupe communities have two or three ceremonials of this kind, Mokwa has only one apart from the *elo*—the *gunnu*,—the remaining rituals being sober esoteric sacrifices, unaccompanied by music, dancing, and public 'merry-making'.[1] We mentioned in a previous context that the number of fixed ceremonials is fairly uniform throughout Nupe;[2] we may now add that the proportion of ceremonials of such combined appeal is similarly uniform. This I take to indicate that the Nupe need for regular pleasurable stimulations has as it were found its own level. Which would mean, further, that Mokwa and the other communities were only balancing a psychological deficit when they adopted the *elo*. Certainly, several of the communities which exhibit the normal Nupe level of ceremonial-*cum*-pleasurable occasions had an equal chance of embracing the *elo* or of copying the similar *gugu*, but have not done so. So that the adoption, by a few groups, of the alien ceremonial for no motive other than that of adding another festivity did yet answer an unsatisfied 'need'.

But let us note a final source of error. We have spoken of the 'pre-existing' interests or needs as though they were bound to be constant, the measure of their satisfaction alone being variable. It is conceivable that this assumption is unwarranted, and that the adoption of the new observance reflects, not a pre-existing interest unsatisfied, but an interest strengthened owing to some change in social conditions. As regards the *elo* and *sogba*, there is no evidence to support this alternative hypothesis. It is, however, borne out in the case of the *gani*. This ceremonial, as I put it before, improves upon the traditional Nupe institutions which ritualize adolescence and age-grade life; it dramatizes these events in a specific and detailed manner where the equivalent traditional ceremonial, the *gunnu*, merely deals summarily with the transition from youth to adulthood, embodying it as one aspect among others in its design. Now, though the age grades have undoubtedly always served to mirror the dominant interests of Nupe life, in rank and in promotion in status, the interests themselves must have gained in

[1] The same is true of Rabah, though there Mohammedan influence has today obliterated the *gunnu*. Gbajibo, the third community practising the *elo*, has two other ceremonials which combine religious with generally pleasurable stimulations, the *gunnu* and the *mamma*; but the latter is celebrated in secrecy, by the men alone, and only as a movable ritual.

[2] See above, p. 70.

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importance with the growth of the Fulani Emirate. As the latter gave greater impetus to desires for a political career and imparted greater severity to the competition for rank and status, so the age grades assumed a novel, and more weighty, significance. With this, the fuller and more specific ritual elaboration of adolescence seems entirely consistent. It was not so that the pre-existing desire to give ritual elaboration to important things had been inadequately expressed; rather, things became important in a new way: so that, when the Nupe adopted the *gani* ceremonial, they were seizing upon a chance to express a changed outlook and a desire reoriented.

As we shall see, the more far-reaching conversion to Islam similarly involves such changing interests and newly emerged trends. Are then, perhaps, any trends visible in Nupe today which may in future lead to further adoptions of alien practices? I will hazard this prediction. The pressure of competition and the obsession with promotion in status, grown strongest in the capital, are visibly leading to anxieties and frustrations, and to mental instability. The incidence of neurotic disorders seems to bear out this tendency, though inadequate records forbid a more definite statement.[1] The mass hysteria of the witchcraft trial mentioned before offers clearer evidence. Such increased tensions may well seek relief in some form of self-abandonment: the *bori* possession cult seems to offer precisely this chance, which might one day be seized upon, its 'uncongenial' appeal notwithstanding.

3. THE CHARACTER OF TRIBAL RELIGION

The preceding discussion referred only to the adoption of isolated practices and items of belief but made no mention of individuals or communities wholly converted to an alien pagan creed. Nor is this unexpected. The religions of pre-literate peoples are not normally of a proselytizing kind. They promise no particular reward to the converted, nor do they place any premium on the conversion of others. Indeed, it seems true to say that this issue never arises, for, as we anticipated, primitive religion is essentially a tribal or national religion, conceived of as inseparable from the particular identity of the group professing it. Expressed differently, primitive religion does not constitute a 'church' which exists in its own right and can be entered (or left) solely by reason of its creed and of the transcendental benefits promised to the believers.[2]

[1] See *A Black Byzantium*, p. 402.

[2] Durkheim's famous identification of 'religion' (of any form) with a 'church' seems to me to rest on an arbitrary use of the latter term; for whatever else may be meant by a 'church', it must mean 'a community organized

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No machinery therefore exists to deal with such contingencies—no provision for tuition of the converts-to-be, and no formal procedure of admission or perhaps excommunication. To say it again, that sum-total of beliefs and practices we call Nupe, Yoruba, or Gwari religion, is simply the religion of the people who, on other grounds also, call themselves Nupe, Yoruba, or Gwari; and though it is possible for single observances or even items of belief (such as the belief in the significance of death by lightning) to be adopted or 'borrowed', the notion that the religion as a whole can be exported or changed for another is inconceivable.

This self-sufficiency of the Nupe faith goes together with a marked detachment and tolerance towards other creeds. The Nupe, as we know, are greatly interested in discussing the religions of others; but they do so dispassionately, and indeed think it possible that the radically different beliefs of their neighbours are justifiable and, in a vague sense, as 'right' as their own. The coexistence of widely varying practices in Nupe itself must have helped in fostering this tolerance towards alien beliefs; certainly, any person showing such tolerance is not for that reason considered an apostate or even a doubter. The Nupe creed simply lays little claim to any exclusive possession of spiritual truth. Yet it is not for that reason less securely held. If the Nupe do not argue that their creed is the best of all possible creeds, neither do they question that, for them, it is simply given, as is their language and all the other features that go with 'being a Nupe'. Their detached tolerance thus seems only the obverse of this self-sufficiency of 'tribal' religions.

The fact that alien observances are sometimes adopted for their apparent utility or some other attraction is not felt to be inconsistent with this notion of a 'given' tribal religion; at least, the inconsistency is corrected by tacitly granting that alien practices could yet 'become Nupe', that is, could be added to those which, at that stage, were indicative of the social identity. The accomplished fact, then, re-establishes the *status quo*; the new religious practice, now regularly executed by a population which by numerous other criteria regards itself as one, as 'the Nupe', becomes itself 'of Nupe'; so that the people can again detachedly view 'alien' observances or beliefs. Let me restate this in more general terms. The conscious identity of Nupe, as of any society, comes from the awareness of a large stable array of modes of behaviour understood to be typical of the society; any single

by officials into an institution which bestows gifts of grace' (on all who seek it), which makes 'the sacred generally 'accessible', and under whose authority members can be 'enrolled' (see Max Weber, 'The Social Psychology of the World Religions', *Essays in Sociology*, p. 288).

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change in this array does not alter the continued consciousness of identity, but is subsumed in it.

This is, of course, a familiar situation, which ultimately accounts for the continuity (or continued self-awareness) of societies even when their cultural possessions, or for that matter their populations, change. Much will depend on the gradualness and restricted scope of the change; a sudden change in which new modes of behaviour greatly outweigh the 'array' of pre-existing ones may disrupt the continued identity. But it need not always do so. For the process just outlined may also be reversed: the society facing such far-reaching changes may yet fasten on to some particular cultural possession which remained unchanged, and consider it sufficiently relevant to furnish a criterion or symbol of the continued identity. Often, as we know, a creed or some religious observance preserved amidst the changes will prove to have this relevance.

This process, too, can be observed among the Nupe, among the colony of emigrants in Lagos, who have lost nearly every feature of culture, including language, which would normally sustain that awareness of 'being Nupe' or 'still being Nupe'. But they have preserved one traditional cult, the *gunnu*; and they still regard themselves as Nupe (calling themselves either Nupe or, more often, Takpa or Tapa, by the Yoruba name). The two things go together; in discussions, when the people wish to emphasize their tribal identity, they at once mention the possession of this cult which, to them, seems decisive.

Let me say a few words about the Nupe colony in Lagos. It numbers perhaps 5,000 people, both scattered over the outlying hamlets and villages and occupying a special quarter in the city of Lagos.[1] The Nupe settlement is claimed to be of considerable antiquity, going back to the Portuguese era, and to have attained its present important and honoured position towards the end of the last century, when the self-made head of the Lagos Nupe, a certain Gana and a 'noted warrior', was elevated to high rank by the Yoruba town king. This Gana, who incidentally was taken to England to be presented to Queen Victoria, was the grandfather of the present chief of the Lagos Nupe, a man of about seventy. Gana's rank, *Osode*, is still held by his descendants, and with the rank goes the priestship of the *gunnu*, which Gana had somehow assumed. The Lagos *gunnu* is a combination of three rites all subsumed under the same name, the *gunnu* itself, the *ndakó gboyá*, and the ritual of the Chain of Tsoede, the paraphernalia of the three

[1] The Nupe quarter in Lagos is known to everyone; its main thoroughfares are called *Tapa Street* and *Osode Street*, the latter deriving its name from the title held by the head of the Nupe colony (see below).

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rites being stored in the 'House of Osode'. Here, too, the crucial ceremonials take place. For though each Nupe hamlet or village in Lagos Colony performs its own rites and several of them possess their own paraphernalia, the ceremonial in the 'House of Osode' comes first and gives the signal for the other performances. Thus the scattered groups of immigrants are held together through being mobilized in the common religious activity, while the Nupe in Lagos Town form a single congregation in the strict sense of the word. The religious rites thus preserved are therefore more than merely a symbol of tribal identity: they also make this identity concretely effective, that is, turn a group aware of itself into one effectively co-operating, if only on one, crucial and impressive occasion.

As regards the rites themselves, they are full of distortions and unorthodox innovations, due partly to the adaptation of the cult to the urban conditions and partly to genuine misunderstandings, linguistic and otherwise.[1] Yoruba influence, too, is visible, in certain anthropomorphisms which have crept into the interpretation of the *ndakó gboyá*. Altogether, the latter has come to overshadow completely the *gunnu* rites proper: the masks, of which there are seven, are now of two kinds, tall ones representing 'fathers', and smaller ones representing 'sons'; while the *ndakó gboyá* as such, far from being understood as an impersonal force, is positively stated to be a male spirit, and is even given a 'wife', symbolized by an upturned pot half-buried in the ground.

But not all the innovations represent merely errors or distortions of a fortuitous and unwitting kind. Three in particular express the new significance attaching to this ceremonial of a group in exile. First, the cult society of the *ndakó gboyá* has been remodelled into a secret society in the strict sense of the word, rigidly organized, and having its lodges in every Nupe village on the coast. Its head is the *Osode*; its members must be Nupe by paternal descent; and initiation is both difficult and expensive, though once it is achieved it remains hereditary. For the people, the *ndakó gboyá* society is unequivocally, and impressively, a piece of 'Nupedom'. If it is difficult to enter the society, this only means that it has come to represent something like an inner ring or élite among those who can call themselves Nupe; and if the *ndakó gboyá* society is now so planned that it includes every Nupe settlement and perpetuates itself by hereditary succession, this makes it another support of tribal identity.

[1] Thus the dance of the young men is called *gunnu ba*, which really means 'place of the *gunnu*', and the courtyard where the esoteric part of the rite takes place is called *kuso*, 'bush'.

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We must note, secondly, that all the Lagos Nupe, without exception, are today Moslems. Oddly enough, they claim to be good Moslems, even though they openly and proudly 'own' the *gunnu* and the other pagan rites. Yet the people see no conflict between the faith they now profess and their adherence to the pagan cults. The two are kept in separate compartments: the Moslem faith belongs to the present; the pagan observances are a token of a past one wishes to continue: they simply go with remaining a Nupe. And if the pagan observances are also supernaturally effective, this seems almost incidental to that other, more relevant, import, of offering occasions to act as Nupe.

Finally, when the Lagos Nupe perform the public episodes of their cults, they do so in the same circumstances in which the alien enclaves in Nupe country stage their religious observances. The *gunnu* and *ndakó gboyá* are watched with keen interest by the whole native population of Lagos; above all, the Nupe 'owners' of the ceremonials are expected to perform them for the well-being of 'the whole town', including the Yoruba, and occasionally at the request of the Yoruba town chief, if some calamity (for example, witchcraft) threatens the population. Here, then, we meet with the exact counterpart of that 'religious division of labour' which turned a cult alien in Nupe into a contribution to the common weal. But the conception of the 'common weal' has been significantly widened; for the prayer formula of the Lagos ceremonials contains a new phrase—'May the whole of Nupe country prosper'. This is clearly a further expression of that 'awareness of social identity', kept alive by a tribe in exile; indeed, no more convincing expression can be conceived than this concern with the welfare of the distant mother country.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The absence, in Nupe, of complete conversions to an alien creed has a notable exception in the steady expansion of Islam. Paradoxically, though the Nupe in strange parts preserve their traditional religion because it is so much the symbol of tribal identity, in Nupe country itself that religion is disappearing. And unlike the Lagos Moslems, who keep Islam and the traditional observances apart, the Nupe in their own country have accepted 'conversion' in all its implications, including the rejection of the earlier creed. Perhaps this is no paradox. For while the emigrants have only their religion to fall back on if they wish to prove to themselves that they are still Nupe, in their own country this issue does not arise. There, Nupe social identity is still sustained by that wider 'stable array' of social facts—unbroken occupation

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of the same territory; political autonomy; and numerous norms of behaviour and types of relationship.

With all this the next chapter will deal. Let me here only explain an apparent omission; if this discussion made no mention of that other religion demanding complete conversion, Christianity, the reason is, simply, the unimportance of Christianity in Nupe life. The number of converts is extremely small and the progress of Christianity insignificant. The Nupe generally are not hostile to those who have become Christians; they do not subject them to special disabilities; nor do they despise them; only mallams will sometimes call Christians, contemptuously, *káfiri*, 'unbelievers'. Here, too, the general attitude is one of tolerance, though it is more pronounced among pagans than among Moslems. The former (including nominal Moslems) quite often send their children to mission schools, and most Nupe keep on friendly terms with missionaries or African evangelists. But this tolerance always goes with the conviction that Christian missionizing will remain ineffectual; friendliness with Christians is unobjectionable only because it is of no consequence. Nor do the Nupe ever commit themselves by their association with Christians. They do not intermarry with Christian converts; they do not ask them to their family feasts; and the converts never come from solid, stable families, but from among unattached individuals—old people without relations, young orphans, or the children of strangers. Even among these, I was told, apostasy often occurs in later life. And here it is not the pagan religion which is the greatest rival of Christianity, but the steadily encroaching Islam.

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discussed elsewhere.[1] Let us, then, turn back to Nupe religion and summarize its character or 'type' on the lines of our list of competences.

2. *Weltbild*: MORALITY

Nupe religion offers practically no cosmological knowledge; what there is of it is conveyed only by the doctrine and not, symbolically, by ritual. There is no interest in any far-flung picture of the universe such as a detailed mythology might present, nor in any closely reasoned account, the 'supplements' of rational knowledge being restricted to positing a remote, vague creator and enumerating a few of his creations. And here speculation stops at the phenomena intimately affecting human life (health and disease, procreation and death, dreams, certain features of inanimate nature). The rest is simply tacitly accepted. Nor are there attempts to interpret the world in anthropomorphous terms and so bring it nearer to human comprehension. The only link between man and this featureless transcendental world, apart from the supernatural controls somehow placed at his command, is vouchsafed by the belief in reincarnation and in an eternally active life principle. The humanly appealing theme of an other-worldly life is left untouched.

The language in which all this is conveyed is the familiar language of everyday life, simple and intentionally clear. Where the vagueness of the subject precludes satisfactory precision, there is recourse either to a simple 'we don't know' or to attempts at exploring linguistic meanings. The former does not imply any suggestion of a relevant mystery behind the visible world, but merely the placid admission of things unknowable. The latter betrays the conviction that the knowledge about the world, such as it is, is meant to be clear and can be clarified if the workaday tool of language is only carefully examined. This aimed-at clarity is further suggested by the predilection for parables and analogies, for juxtaposition or opposition, and by the many enumerations by twos and fours which pervade the doctrine.

This schematicism is essentially abstract, involving no visual or similarly palpable aids, such as an alignment with colours or spatial orientations. Nor are these invested with symbolic meaning save in a few isolated instances (when black stands for secrecy and evilness, red for prosperity, and right and left for male and female respectively). Enumeration again serves only to order things schematically and clearly, the symbolic potentialities of numbers being ignored: thus there are no lucky or unlucky numbers, no numbers in any other way meaningful (save, in a crude form, in divination).

[1] See my *Foundations*, pp. 256–7 *et seq.*

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771 divination). The belief in lucky or unlucky days and months is not really an exception; for the numerical order underlying their selection is neither systematic nor valid apart from this one context.

It is important, however, that the tendency to enumeration and schematic juxtapositions does not characterize the formulated doctrine alone ('There are four things in the world'); it is as typical of the way in which individuals express their own speculative and occasionally unorthodox views, for example—'There are two gods, one in the sky, the other on earth'; 'The female spirits live in the water, male spirits on the land.' Thus there is some interest in speculation, which is often keen and readily engaged in. But it relates only to the given topics of religion, that is, to notions already formulated, and does not attempt to break new ground. In other words, the people are content with a bare and fragmentary *Weltbild*, but feel the desire, though not for wider knowledge, yet for greater clarity in the knowledge they possess. In either case the treatment is schematic rather than syllogistic, and nominalistic in that it leans on the intelligibility of words and on semantic exercises.

771 182 The religious knowledge so framed exhibits close consistency with other sectors of the culture. The non-anthropomorphous and abstract character of religion tallies with the non-realistic art of Nupe, and the emphasis on schematic arrangements in the former, with the geometrical-ornamental accent of the latter. Perhaps, too, there is a logical nexus between the unconcern with deities or humanized features of the universe and the absence of any drama proper (either in art or religion). The tendency to enumerations is visible also in Nupe folklore and in the Nupe calendar (where months are referred to by numbers). The same is true of status differences, political ranks, and age grades, which are always presented in schematic form and precisely numbered, even at the cost of inaccuracy; let me add that in a large number of communities the senior and politically important ranks number four. Nor are dichotomous arrangements less frequent; think only of the common juxtaposition of *Žitsú* ('town king') and *Žigí* ('town priest'). The dualism of the sexes, in particular, is carried to a considerable extent through Nupe language, which assigns a gender, expressed by adding the attribute 'male' or 'female', also to trees and plants. The interest, finally, in analogies and semantic exercises is amply exemplified: in Nupe literature, where whole stories are based on puns or on the ambiguity of words; in attempts at producing persuasive pedigrees for present customs by means of etymological speculations; and in ordinary conversation.

These are all preferred ways of handling and ordering material (of whatever kind); and since they are visible both within and

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without the sphere of religion we may say of the latter that it is an expression (among others) of the basic intellectual orientation of the people. There is one exception, however. In the secular sphere the Nupe are keen historians, always interested in tracing things back to their past. In their religious conceptions this interest is almost entirely absent; so far as it exists, it ceases to be religious, being satisfied with summary references to extraneous, political-historical events, such as the introduction of a cult by Tsoede or the origin of some religious practice in the reign of a particular king. At this point the attitudes towards things sacred and profane diverge; only the latter require a precise time perspective; the former are simply given, or adequately explained by that timeless *ultima causa*, the deity.

To return for a moment to the Nupe bias for dualistic conceptions. Though we have grouped it with the other 'intellectual orientations', with predilection for enumerations, parables, and so forth, it clearly betrays more than this kind of predisposition, serving also to articulate the sharply felt and emotionally weighted antagonism of the sexes, as in witchcraft fantasies and in the belief in the deadly female 'germ' of the 'diseases of God'. And since the awareness of this antagonism springs from unconscious sources, it would seem to be of a different and more fundamental order than the other expressions of the dualistic bias. Shall we, then, hold the two apart? Even so, there remains the uniformly dualistic *Weltbild*, whether it expresses the unconscious sexual anxieties of men or their dispassionate intellectual efforts to order the phenomena of the world. Or shall we assume some play of cause and effect between the two, taking the awareness of sex antagonism to be at the root of the intellectual bias, in the sense that it shaped a predisposition towards finding dichotomies also in all other areas of experience? Clearly, we might equally assume the opposite, that is, that the conception of sex antagonism in witchcraft and elsewhere would not have crystallized had it not been facilitated by a congenial intellectual predisposition. There is, I think, no answer to these questions. The dualistic viewpoint is simply one of the cardinal possibilities upon which the human intellect can seize in structuring the world of experience; and the antagonism of male and female represents once more one of very few possibilities available to societies, or to man in society, in their efforts to structure the universe of human relationships. All we can legitimately say is that the two emerged together, in mutual consistency.

The witchcraft belief simply that other dichotomy, of 'good' and 'evil', as does the belief in spirits and in the character of humans inscrutably fashioned by God. But this dichotomy is formulated only on this cosmic scale, referring to the 'things that are in the

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world', and has no narrower, pragmatic or ethical application. As for the realm of ethics, Nupe doctrine is altogether silent. It upholds no ideal man, nor condemns his antithesis. There is no eschatology, no mythology exemplifying rights and wrongs, crime and retribution, and no promise of reward to the law-abiding. Nor is the formulated doctrine concerned with norms of action of more common currency, the simple rights and wrongs of everyday morality. 'Economic ethics' has its place in ritual; since this turns upon such things as birth, marriage and adolescence, crops and the exigencies of the seasons, prosperity and wealth, that is, upon events and conditions involving practical decisions, the respective courses of action are implicitly upheld as desirable, worthwhile and 'right'. But they are not 'announced' or 'revealed', neither commanded nor yet conspicuously dramatized. Their significance is left to preliminary knowledge, the worshippers knowing at the outset what to expect of the ritual, both as regards its aim and the promises it vouchsafes. And these are again silent on ethical issues. The fortunes anticipated and the misfortunes that may befall you imply neither merit nor punishment: they simply happen, while religion means no more than an aid in attaining or evading them.

Only two explicit ethical commands occur in the whole range of Nupe rituals. They refer to filial obedience (enjoined in the *gunnu*) and to the blessedness of fecundity. But we remember that the relevant episode of the *gunnu* is also the first to fall victim to change, and that other religiously sanctioned aids, the services of the *cigbeci*, are dispensed in disregard of the moral condemnation of childlessness. On balance, then, Nupe religion is amoral. As we anticipated, the crucial issue in most religions, how to reconcile the discrepancy of religious merit and practical rewards, simply does not arise. Nupe religion takes life as it is, offering no 'annunciations and promises' that would redress its iniquities, and hardly even endorsing the equity that should govern it.

This equity is largely left to the care of secular agencies alone. Religion plays a part only indirectly, through sanctioning the persons—kings, chiefs, executioners—who act as guardians of the accepted good. The sanction lies essentially in ritual, that is, in the various ceremonials involved in the assumption of these offices or entrusted to their holders. But let us note that these men guard, not really morality, but only that part of it which has solidified in the form of politically enforced law. Differently expressed, Nupe society knows mainly crimes and few 'sins', and only lawful, not saintly behaviour. On occasion religion abandons even this indirect support for the conventions of morality; for certain rituals deny these conventions, as in the sexual licence of the *gunnu* and *gani* or in the condonation of violence in the *navũ*. At this point, then, the

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logical consistency between religion and the rest of social life ceases to be valid. Morally, the rituals in question have no message; or their message is a circuitous one, exemplifying the rule by the exception. Their 'competence' cannot therefore lie in this topsy-turvy picture of common morality: rather, as we already suggested, does it lie in the offer of explosive relief from normal constraints.

Let me say a little more on the amorality of the Nupe creed. Nupe religion, as we have seen, sanctions only the powers that be, the machinery of political control, and hence the claims of secular society to declare what is right and wrong. Religion by itself vouchsafes no direct and 'higher' assurance of this kind. It does not as it were speak for society, but only stands behind the appointed spokesmen. Needless to say, most religions go beyond this *carte blanche* for secular society. And in doing so they achieve two things: doubts and conflicts arising in mundane ethics can be resolved by the assurance that there are these other, 'higher' or 'eternal', values; and these can in turn serve as ideals which man is called upon to approach, however imperfectly. So that religion can both absorb the iniquities of human existence and give it an impetus towards making the world better than it is. Nupe religion can do neither. Thus conflicts over mundane ethics can be absorbed into religion only in the one province which itself proclaims the inevitability of conflicts, namely, in the hostile fantasies of witchcraft. And offering nothing 'higher' than an endorsement of mundane ethics, religion is emptied of its impetus towards world improvement: it is static, non-progressive, non-messianic, and once more content to take 'life as it is'.

3. RELIGION AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

There is a certain overlap between this new nexus and the one just discussed. For since any group, of whatever structure, is such only in virtue of the norms of acting enjoined upon its members, the pronouncements of religion upon 'right' and 'wrong' conduct (say, 'thou shalt honour thy father and mother') already serve to uphold the group so constituted (the family, or the society based upon filial piety). Yet there is that special competence of religion to uphold group existence and structure as such, and not only such specific manners of acting as may form the subject of ethical commands. Nor can group existence and group structure be 'commanded': they can only be demonstrated or circuitously affirmed, though occasionally they are explicitly asserted, as in Judaism with its tenet of a 'chosen people', serving a tribal or national God.

Again, Nupe religion lacks such explicit assertions, as it lacks

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also that conspicuous focus of group existence, a tribal god. There is no conception that the deity is concerned with this one people only or that the Nupe people are the sole or chosen possessors of true religion. To be sure, there are the legends explaining how the Nupe acquired *cigbe*, the Chain of Tsoede, and particular rituals; but it is understood that other peoples also have medicines, rituals, and supernatural skills of various kinds. The Nupe tribe lays claim only to the possession of certain *particular* instances, not of the *genera* ritual or medicine. Even so qualified, this claim or title becomes an aspect of group identity and hence one of the supports of the tribe's existence as a group. A similar possession of particular observances and sacred skills also identifies the groups of diverse or lesser inclusiveness: the state (which possesses the 'royal cults'); the village community (which may possess a special *kuti*); and the kin group (which possesses hereditary *cigbe* and ancestral sacrifices.

This possession is adjusted even more finely, so that it comes to affirm, not only the corporate identity of this or that group, but also its internal structure. For as the administration of the village *kuti* is vested in single kin groups but serves the whole community, so it endorses the make-up of a group in all other respects similarly segmented yet co-operative; and as the administration of kinship rituals falls to the senior man in the lineage and descends in that line but is meant to benefit also wives, mothers, daughters- and sisters-in-law, so it endorses the basic kin group, the extended family or 'house'. All of which implications are contained in the Nupe conception of the 'ownership' of cults.

This ownership, though corporate, does not *make* the group in question; it pertains to groups already constituted as such by other criteria, whatever they may be—common language, territorial possession, citizenship, descent, cohabitation, and so forth. The possession of the religious observances is thus a feature of group identity only in combination with all the others and in fact presupposes them. This relationship is reversed only once, in the case of the Nupe emigrants whose title to 'Nupedom' rests solely on the retention of the traditional cults.

The Nupe congregation, in the wider or narrower sense, is such inevitably, mainly by descent, and not by individual choice, as is the case in a 'church' open to all comers. Fundamentally, this is a closed religion, bound up with membership of tribe, nation, village or kin group, and part of the 'estate' of these groups. In a few instances—most (not all) *cigbe*, divination, the unimportant sacrifices to spirits—the benefits of religion are accessible to individuals *qua* individuals, even to strangers from other tribes. In all other respects individuals share in the ministrations of religion only in

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virtue of their membership of the respective groups, and share in them on equal terms. For there are no qualifications which might make one unpredictably a vessel of divine grace, nor degrees of sacredness attainable by personal endeavour. The miraculous birth of the *gunnu* priest comes closest to the former conception; while the technical skills of *cigbe* and the *ndakó gboyá* society with its open recruitment at least enable individuals so inclined to become active agents of the supernatural. Even so, these are not qualifications for religious excellence nor calls for spiritual leadership. The Nupe congregation has equal access to grace and blessings; it knows no spiritual leaders or chosen vessels: it is a 'mass', not a 'virtuoso' religion.

But consider that secular life, with its ranks and status differences, is governed by precisely these notions of individual effort after excellence and of unequal access to existing benefits. In a sense, then, the ideals of secular and religious life are opposed to one another. Yet if they were not thus opposed, if effort after excellence held good in the religious congregation as much as it does in the mundane society, the diverse achievements might easily clash and lead to divided leadership. As it is, this cannot happen. One of the results is that Nupe religion, unlike other creeds, is incapable of compensating the failures of secular ambition with the promise of spiritual success or exaltation; another, that religion can achieve that other competence, of fully supporting 'mundane ethics'. It need not have been so. The egalitarianism of this 'mass religion' might have meant the promise, and hence that other 'compensation', of equality before God, as against the inequalities of which Nupe life is full. But this potentiality is left unexploited. In so far as Nupe religion deviates from the values governing secular life, it does so with insufficient emphasis to carry such a message of hope; indeed, the message it might have carried would be belied by too many other features of the creed and manner of worship.

We have so far considered the 'congregation' in the wider sense, as a community possessing such-and-such observances and means of communing with the supernatural. Understood as a collection of individuals worshipping together, the congregation again endorses or upholds the relevant groups existing within the society, now through mobilizing them in the act of worship. The tribe is not a congregation in this narrower sense, and the nation becomes one only intermittently and partially; but the presence of these inclusive groups is recalled in the prayer formulæ which mention the ancestor king Tsoede and on occasion call divine blessing upon 'the whole land of Nupe'. The village community is invariably a congregation-in-worship (and is mentioned in the prayer), as is

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also the kin group, in the different kinship ceremonials. As for individuals, they may by themselves solicit the more technical supernatural aids; but there is no true worship by individuals, only worship in groups or, in solitary sacrifices and the like, on behalf of groups.

The congregation-in-worship, over and above mobilizing a particular group, also mobilizes it in such manner that its internal structure is thrown into relief. We recall such features as the 'inner circle' of worshippers, composed of mature men; the roles of officiants, vested in titled elders or family heads; the precedence of rank, observed in the communal meal; the subordinate tasks assigned to adolescents, the obedience demanded of them, and the partial exclusion of women and strangers. The arrangement of the congregation, then, mirrors the status arrangements meant to be valid in mundane society, so that the latter is demonstrated so-so-speak, in model form, dramatized, and endorsed by the sacred context.

We note again that religion has no message of its own, transcending or reversing the secular norms: there is no preaching of, say, 'the first shall be last'. Even the festivals of youth, *gani* and *navũ*, though they grant to the adolescents a freedom and initiative not normally enjoyed, also exemplify in various ways respect for rank and loyalty to political leadership. Nor does religious practice cancel that paramount factor in secular society, wealth: we remember the cost of rituals (communal or kinship) and of supernatural aids privately solicited, which causes the former to vary in scale with available means and may make the latter inaccessible to the poor. This point is important since one feature of ritual procedure may seem to indicate a reversal of the secular ideal. I am referring to the uniform, simple dress obligatory in the pagan rites, which thus excludes the visible tokens of wealth from the circle of worshippers. It was left to the Moslem ceremonials with their chances for display to remove this egalitarian touch. But it is only a touch and no more, representing no effective symbolism; for the people do not derive any message or moral from it but regard it merely as a ritual rule among others, meant to draw the line between sacred and profane occasions.

Let us therefore call Nupe religion conservative, non-revolutionary, and again, non-messianic. Only in one respect does the congregation fail to 'mirror' social reality correctly, in that it upholds a subordinate position of the women which is not true in real life. For the men, religious practice thus expresses an ideal frustrated in every-day experience. But in this one sphere of conflict where religion no longer endorses 'life as it is', it is also incapable of contenting the believers, forcing them to resort to the fantasies

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about female witches and to the vicarious satisfaction of witch-hunting. Nupe religion, we must conclude, cannot hold its own as a messenger of ideals.

4. ASSURANCE AND STIMULATION

We have already mentioned the circular efficacy linking these two components of religious experience. Yet they can be separated in analysis, as much (or as little) as the mere knowing and learning of religious truths can be held apart from the actual living through acts of devotion.

Concerning the assurances about the world and man's place in it which can be known and learned, there is little to say, and most that can be said is negative. Nupe doctrine does not teach that the universe is benevolent or that the deity is closely concerned with human fate. Though man has skills and ritual procedures to invoke supernatural aid, their outcome will often remain uncertain. Thus these skills and procedures contain only traces of the calculable forcefulness of 'magic'. The strictly technical manipulations of *cigbe* come closest to this conception; yet they, too, are subject to the will of God, or accident, and even the miraculous medicines in which one places absolute confidence involve 'invocations' (not 'spells') and hence an element of submission. In the last resort, man can only appeal and supplicate; if, on balance, Nupe religion is optimistic, this only means that it holds out hopes in the face of a world governed by accident, not that there is an assured or reassuring design behind it.

To turn to the 'stimulations'. We need not stress again that the self-abandonment of the mystic or visionary is utterly foreign to the Nupe. Never does the worshipper face his god in solitude, drawing only upon his inward experience or seeking private illumination. Nor is the mood he seeks in his worship entirely religious, that is, unattainable save through the 'thought of supernatural relations'; for in all the major rites at least, that mood emerges also from the added stimuli of music, dancing, crowd behaviour, and perhaps sexual excitement. Generally, the mood of Nupe worship is restrained and calm, leading to no extremes either of fear and stress or of exultation. The absence of elaborate ritualism precludes the tensions that go with rigidly prescribed gestures or speech; in avoiding nocturnal performances most rituals also avoid the sharp accents of fear and mystery; and the rules of ritual etiquette usually curb abandoned behaviour.

Above all, the mood of Nupe worship lacks development. The ritual prepares and holds a sense of the sacred in various, familiar ways—through rules marking off the ritual occasion from ordinary

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ones; through the subdued, solemn manner of applying oneself to the ritual task; and through the serious import of the supplication. But this mood is merely 'lived through'; it involves no mounting expectancy, pressing for some culminating experience or final fulfilment. In the act of worship proper, embodied in the esoteric phase of any rite, the prayer or the sacrificial meal might play that part. Intellectually, the prayer represents the crucial moment, when the whole purpose of the ritual is made clear and the appeal or hope articulately expressed. In the large-scale ceremonials, too, there is some emotional preparation for that moment, drumming and singing being abruptly silenced when the prayer is about to be uttered. Yet it is uttered too early in the proceedings and uttered too informally to come as a culminating stage. The sacrificial meal stands out in that it concludes the act of worship proper; but just then the solemn mood is also visibly fading.

The movable rites and minor observances; consisting as they do only of prayer and sacrifice, do not progress beyond that short-lived 'sensing of the sacred'. And if the great ceremonials offer further excitements and something akin to a final climax, these no longer grow out of the awareness of transcendental events, but are achieved through the massed stimuli of more common appeal —music, dancing, and so forth. As I suggested in an earlier context, some anticipation of the final stimulations must fuse with the mood of the worship proper; as the congregation in turn retains some sense of the sacred even in the phase of the 'merry-making', though in the absence of elaborate symbols acting as 'reminders' that sense is none too secure. What is important is that the worship as such does not work up to any final 'fulfilment'; rather, the emotional tensions remain diffuse and without climax. They only sensitize the congregation to the 'annunciations and promises' voiced in the ritual but do not prepare the worshippers for revelations.

The bush vigil in the *gunnu* may seem an exception since here certain pronouncements are made to a congregation previously exposed to fear and the thrills of mystery. But again, this is not a true climax of religious experience; this episode is only a prelude to the actual rite (and can in fact be omitted); while the pronouncement is concerned with nothing more momentous than an admonishment of adolescents. Indeed, the very mood of fear and mystery, which would seem so congenial to the expectancy of revelations, must be called exceptional. One other ritual, the *mamma*, is staged in a similar atmosphere; but it occurs only in a few communities and is performed with little excitement or awe; nor does it carry any message or 'annunciation'.

Another exception is more important. In each Nupe community the calm and restrained mood of worship is reversed once, in the

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abandoned excitement of one or the other of the three ceremonials *gunnu*, *gani* and *navũ*. This break in the 'ethos' of Nupe religion carries its own explanation; for it is understood as a licence, setting aside normally valid and precisely named controls—of sex and of physical violence against political opponents. Here, then, impulses repressed in secular life are compensated, and tensions generated through the repression, offered explosive, or 'cathartic', release. Religion, in providing these outlets (on circumscribed occasions), anticipates as well as canalizes the working of psychological mechanisms, which might otherwise operate in random fashion or beyond the control of the society, in the 'private worlds' of neuroses and psychopathic fantasies.[1]

Probably no society is free from some such repressions. In Nupe, they are clearly traceable. The 'ethos' of Nupe life is again generally calm and restrained; but in some measure it is only meant to appear so. That it also conceals deep anxieties and tensions is shown by the witchcraft fantasies, which belie the acquiescence so often typical of the overt relationship between the sexes. And in one sphere of social life, in political ambition, passions and anxieties come to the surface. Consider, however, that this intense political rivalry is itself an instance of 'constraint', imposed as it is by the rigid class society. Indeed, it is doubly 'constrained'; for the passions here aroused are not permitted free play, as they might in some kind of jungle ethics, but are hemmed in by an intricate code of etiquette imposing semblance of gentility and acquiescence. We must conclude, then, that the uneven mood of Nupe religion indicates an 'ethos' kept calm and unexcited through those circumscribed chances of unrestraint. In other words, while certain facts of worship express the calmness meant to govern mundane life, others make it possible, through absorbing its disturbances into their own explosive mood. As we know, the balance is imperfect; there are the sudden outbursts of political passion when pent-up tensions find 'random' relief, as well as escapes into neurosis. Let us note a further point. One familiar 'compensation', in the form of fantasies about a golden age or a promised millennium, is entirely absent in Nupe religion. The Nupe attempt to resolve the 'uneasiness' of reality not in ideological fashion but, as I put it before, by the 'sheer dynamics' of repressions lifted and emotional tensions relieved.

Here we are already touching upon the fusion of 'assurance' and 'stimulation'. It occurs, briefly, when 'living through' the acts of worship leaves some lasting effect upon the individual's attitude towards the world around him: the cathartic relief of the few hectic rituals implies precisely this. Yet the effect is diffuse and in

[1] See my *Foundations*, p. 356.

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a sense crude, containing no intellectual insight or gain; nor perhaps is the gain a lasting one. In a cruder form still, much the same change is entailed in any exciting or pleasurable interruption of workaday routine and in the consequent readiness for further work; which effect, too, must be ascribed to the Nupe ceremonials and festivities. But clearly, the fusion of 'stimulation' and 'assurance' can operate also on a higher, that is, more conscious, plane. It is in this sense that theologians think of the access of faith or fortitude entailed in acts of worship and William James speaks of the 'assurance of safety' and the 'new zest which adds itself like a gift to life'.[1]

Undoubtedly, this is true also of Nupe religion, even though its acts of worship are without precise revelations and merely voice hopes impressive only because they are reinforced by diffuse excitements. Yet if we grant this access of faith, we must grant also that it will have to prevail against difficulties, failures and disappointments. Acts of worship, therefore, both build up faith and draw upon it. Somewhat differently expressed, we have made this point in an earlier context; there, too, we suggested that only the fixed rituals, whose aims are fundamentally unspecific and whose design brings into play all the more stirring stimulations, can assume the former role; while the movable rites and all the other contingent observances, being prosaic and meant to be successful in specific needs, apply faith and draw upon it as much as, fortuitously, they may strengthen it.[2] Let me add this observation only. The fixed rituals, though they engender faith, are not meant to be repeated or changed for the sake of greater efficacy. They are prescribed occasions when man can commune with the deity and touch divine power, and through this alone a source of assurance. Also, their number is small, so that Nupe life is not punctuated with occasions creative of faith. Here, then, we meet with something like an economy of faith which seems to have found its own level.

In other religions this economy may work differently. Certainly, it seems to work in Nupe, where it goes together with an unambitious doctrine allowing for the failure of specific appeals and upholding no firm over-all assurance. For by and large, the tenor of Nupe life is optimistic; nor are there any instances of individuals turning cynics or being driven into unbelief by disappointed hopes. Does this mean that the zest and assurance evoked in the acts of worship (but tempered and hence protected by the cautious doctrine) are sufficient to endure and pervade all the efforts of practical life? or only that religious experience is not meant to be enduring and pervasive?

[1] Op cit., pp. 403–4.

[2] See above, pp. 105–6.

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We cannot precisely measure this psychological aftermath of acts of worship. But we can assess it indirectly, from the concern with religious experiences visible in everyday life. And here it is quite clear that our second assumption is the correct one. For the acts of worship do not leave any vivid awareness of the achieved communion with the deity nor any lasting sense of the holy. There is nothing of 'religiosity' in the Nupe character. He knows, of course, at all times, that there is a God and a realm of the supernatural; but ordinarily this is tacit knowledge, of no practical relevance, neither permanently awe-inspiring nor permanently exhilarating. Crudely speaking, the Nupe are religious only on religious occasions; in between, life is an affair of secular values and rules-of-thumb. That even sacred places are 'sacred' only at certain times of the year is part of the same attitude; so is the absence of any conception of personal holiness. Even Islam, with its daily prayers, its Friday service, and its pious scholars, has hardly affected this attitude. For the daily prayers have become unthinking routine, without any touch of the mystic; being a mallam is a profession among others and often combined with them; and the Moslem cult of saints or 'holy men' found no response.

All this means that the spheres of religion and the profane remain clearly separable. Probably few religions merge completely with secular life so that every possible action bears some reference to transcendental notions. Nor, of course, can we conceive of religions which would at no point coincide with mundane interests. But the border zone between the two can be more or less wide and more or less sharply circumscribed. In Nupe, this zone is narrow and sharply outlined. Wherever the 'competences' of religion bear on mundane interests we can readily mark the point where the coincidence ceases. There is no 'carry-over' from one to the other. Thus religion sustains the offices of chiefs, kings, and other exponents of authority and law: but their person is not sacred, and criminals convicted by these holders of supernaturally sanctioned offices are not treated with any show of awe or sacred horror. Religion helps to bind together the kin group through the belief in reincarnation, through ancestral sacrifices, and through the solemnization of marriage and birth: but the Nupe do not, on normal occasions, speak the names of the ancestors with bated breath or constantly worry about placating their spirits. Marriage is in no sense sacred, and children are not holy; even children whose birth is ascribed to the efficacy of sacrifice are not treated in any special way.[1] Nor, finally, are the sick who recover with supernatural aid or the crops that thrive after some rite has been duly

[1] The only rules of this kind are entailed in the *sogba* cult, of alien origin.

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performed subject to special taboos or other rules meant to recall the divine intervention.

Nupe religion, then, has a defined place in the scheme of things. It is not that scheme itself, embracing or giving meaning to all other things with which human life is concerned. If religion engenders assurance and optimism, human life yet relies equally on the assurance and confidence that go with rational skills and mundane experiences. This is hardly unexpected. A religion which provides no *Weltbild*; which keeps aloof from moral judgments; which upholds no messianic ideals; and which rejects the incalculable revelations of mystics, is also a religion content with its own province. That province still 'supplements' or completes all the others and 'transcends' whatever they offer in the way of rational understanding, practical measures, and exhilarating or reassuring experiences. But this careful fit of a province among others, even though it completes their series on a higher, transcendental plane, has something of the rational. It savours of some plan of giving unto religion only what is hers, by some right that can be reasoned out. Perhaps we should say that Nupe religion is as rational as religion can be.

But this is, in religion, not a golden mean. The Nupe case does not prove that a religion thus rationally tempered saves the believers from disturbing doubts or cosmic fears just because its claims and promises are so unambitious. Nupe religion may well aim to be a sort of Plutarchian creed, steering a middle course between unbelief and too much belief, where man neither 'directeth and opposeth all his plaints and lamentations against fortune and casuality', nor yet 'will think and say that every disease and infirmity of his body, all his losses . . . and his repulses and disgraces are so many plagues inflicted upon him by the ire of the gods and the very assaults of divine justice.'[1] But in thinking neither wholly one thing nor wholly the other, the Nupe yet invite one sharp repulse to their mood of optimism: for they know the deep fear of witchcraft. And this is not, in their case, a fear of the consequences of impiety or of 'divine justice'; rather is it born of the awareness that the universe is inadequately controlled, and hence that the province of religion is too narrow.

[1] Plutarch, 'Of Superstition'; *Moralia*, translated by Philemon Holland, 1911 edition, p. 380.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CULTS

General

771 [162] The majority of the Nupe are now Moslems and there is at least one small mosque in every village. The 1931 Census gave 235,990 Moslems out of a total of 324,375 for all religions.[1] But in many communities pagan ritual exists side by side with some Moslem observances, the latter being increasingly adopted for reasons of prestige.

Among the pagans there is common belief in a sky god *Sokó*, who is believed to have created the world and then withdrawn himself from communion with man. The Nupe concept of the cosmos is, according to Nadel, fundamentally amoral. God, having created the world, gave men access to certain mystical forces, making them at the same time subject to these and leaving them to make such use of these "powers" and of the material world as they would and could. First among these mystical forces is *kuti*, the compelling power of ritual, believed to be harnessed in varying degrees in a multiplicity of rites belonging to persons, communities, and associations, and conferring both special benefits or protection and increasing general well-being. At the same time, invocation of the ancestors of kinsfolk, of the people at large, and of the ancient rulers, can afford some measure of benefit or protection. This can also be gained through a separate use of "medicines" which are believed variously to combine pseudo-therapeutic and magical properties. Finally, the evil power of witchcraft, which God also put into the world, has to be discovered, punished, and driven out by special rites. Since, moreover, there are these alternatives with reference to both good fortune and bad, divination has a great part to play in determining the rites to be performed in particular situations.[2]

Spirits

776 The Nupe believe that immaterial beings, existing in their own right and with some human attributes, live in the bush or in hills, trees, watercourses, and other natural features. Their Hausa-Arabic name (*aljenúfi*, sing. *aljénu*) suggests that some aspects of this belief may be borrowed from Islam. The spirits may be male or female, friendly or hostile, though only two—*Ndáduma* (Father Niger) and *Ketsá* (associated with a rock in midstream near Jebba Island)—are thought to possess any considerable powers.[3] Another group of spirits is vaguely associated with animals. The least clearly conceived are personal spirits or spirit doubles, which belong to every individual from birth to death and cannot be changed. These may be good or bad.[4]

769 776 Spirits of the dead (*kuci*) may be reincarnated in their own descendants. Approach to the Supreme Being can be made through ancestral spirits. Special sacrifices are performed either in the house or on the grave of a particular ancestor and the *kuci* are invariably invoked in the ceremonials surrounding birth, marriage, and death. Otherwise it seems that ancestral sacrifices are performed only sporadically and for a specific reason, such as illness in the family.[5]

776 Tsoéde, who is regarded by all Nupe as their common ancestor, is venerated in an elaborate cycle of myths and rituals surrounding sacred objects—chains and bronze figures—connected with him.[6] He is, however, outside the general framework of Nupe religious beliefs.

[1] Census of Nigeria, vol. II, p. 63. Unfortunately there are no later figures available for comparison.
[2] See below, pp. 47–8.
[3] See below.
[4] Nadel, 1954a, pp. 26–31.
[5] Ibid., pp. 23–6.
[6] Ibid., pp. 31–2.

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131 The Nupe people are distributed over the southern part
771 of the Protectorate in clans that have little connection with each other. Probably nearly half are pagans practising different forms of religion, the remainder are Muhammadans. The Niger Province is the headquarters of the tribe, who are to be found in their greatest numbers in the vicinity of the Niger and Kaduna Rivers. They claim to be indigenous, but some authorities
173 trace a connection between them and the Gabi, erstwhile inhabitants of Egypt. There is a legend to the effect that a certain stranger, a hunter, called Abduazizi, travelling from the east, arrived with his family at the town of Doko Daji, where he settled amongst the Bini. He was given the title of Nefiu, the Arabic word for fugitive, whence arises the corruption Nufe, Nupe. It is also asserted that Nupe is not so much the name
[201] of a tribe as of a language, and that it may well be that the new
177 comers adopted the speech of the older inhabitants, the Gwari or Gbari, between which and Nupe there are now only

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77 offerings of goats and fowls. The "Ndakogboiya" is, however, losing its efficacy, and indeed Muhammadanism is rapidly replacing the ancient faith.

197 634 The influence of the Nupe is great, as may be seen from the following lists of septs who speak the Nupe language, or a dialect thereof, and are probably of Nupe origin. These dialects are intelligible to all Nupe. The first three mentioned were by far the largest and most important.

1. Pateji.
2. Kupa.
3. Baedeji.*
4. Kede.
5. Bangawa.†
6. Bata.
7. Batachi.
8. Bini.
9. Dibo.‡
10. Duchu.
11. Ebe.
12. Etsu.§
13. Kakanda.†
14. Kusopa.
15. Zumbufu.
16. Kutegi.§
17. Enegi.§
18. Gbachi.§
19. Ganagana.‡

634 The Nupe of Pateji are situated in Ilorin Province. They are the descendants of the original Nupe Sarakuna, who are now scattered all over the country and are called "Agabi," the [304] name for their distinctive mark of one broad scar on each side of the nose (on the cheek). The custom of cicatrization has become optional.

The Nupe of Kupa inhabit the Agbaja District of Kabba [304] Province; there are also a few in the Bunu District. Their distinctive mark is two lines on each side of the face, from the temple to the lip; within these are a series of small cuts. Their population number some 3,600. Their name is said to be a contraction of "Oku-pari" (=canoe-men of Oku), a river in [141] Kontagora Province. Their weapons are flint locks and spears, arrows only being used in small numbers.

The Kede are a riverain section who have spread along the river banks in the Niger and Ilorin Provinces. The word "Kede" signifies "Dan Sarki," and is connected with a tradition that dates back to the sixteenth century, circ. 1505 A.D., when Edigi, who was travelling up the river, received assistance with his canoe from a man whom he found seated upon a stone fishing, gowned in two robes, one black, the other white. Edigi, when he had established himself as King, conferred upon this man the title of Kuta (which means the man who wears gowns of black and white). One of the Kuta's salutations is "takun"

* The Baedeji are of Yoruba extraction, though, having settled in Nupe territory at Jebba, they have adopted the Nupe language.

† Their Nupe origin is disputed.

‡ The Dibo, Ganagana and Kakanda are sometimes claimed as Nupe, but their languages are different, and it is unlikely that their connection is closer than that induced by neighbourhood.

§ Naturalised Nupe.

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(a stone), in commemoration of the legend. Only a man who lives by the river and is a canoe-man can be a Kede. The men never marry outside the clan, though the women will sometimes do so. They keep very much to themselves, and no stranger was permitted to enter the town of Pojo, not even the Emir of Bida, whose suzerainty they recognised. 634 [186]

They are pagans and pray to gods or departed spirits in the rivers. Many hundreds of men will enter the water together and gaze into it, for hours and even days together, while they make prayer. They say that a race of people inhabit the rivers, that they are very fine people, but small, and that they have power over all things in the water. The Kede are great swimmers, and can see things in the water that are hidden from other men. For instance, a girl at Egga, who was bathing in the early morning, in company with many others, was caught in an eddy and disappeared. People searched for her body all day, but they could not find it. They summoned a Kede from Pojo. He arrived the following morning and brought her body to the surface in half an hour. Her hands and feet were locked, so that no one could unclench them, and her mouth was tightly shut. She was laid in a hut and the people gathered round her and mourned her, for they believed her to be dead. The Kede man told them that she was not dead, and he had her carried to his house, where he gave her medicines, and in three days she was well. [481]

The Bangawa are a riverain section, practising the trade of canoe-men and fishermen in the Bida Emirate. Their Nupe origin is disputed.

There is a Haussa tribe of the same name, who came from Katsina, but it is unlikely that there is any connection between them and the Nupe off-set.

In Lapai Emirate the Bata tribe number some 5,000 to 6,000. They are an agricultural people and collect sylvan produce, i.e., shea-nuts and palm kernels, from which they extract oil. The only industry extensively practised is weaving. Their Sarakuna form a judicial council, presided over by a head-man, which is directly responsible to the Emir. [285]

The Batachi are a riverain section in the Bida Emirate. The name means "talaka," and is descriptive of their social position towards the Nupe.

The Bini section are the aboriginal occupants of Bida. Their other principal towns are Doko, Eyagi, Tua, Pichi and Wuya. The name Bini signifies, "he who opens his mouth fully to speak the truth." They are a pagan race, and practised their rites on the Hill of Tua some three or four miles out of Bida town. The sacrifice of a black ox, etc., was part of the formula, and the dead were buried in pots at the base of the hill. These practices were put an end to by the father of the present Emir of Bida. The Bini are fast dying out. There are two sub-sections, [771] [782]

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634 the Isaji, who are now distributed over the Pateji Division of Ilorin Province, Kontagora Province, and the Bida Emirate, having been dispersed at the beginning of the nineteenth century from G'bara (now Jimunli); and the Gwagbaji who fled from Jengi near Rabba, north to Kontagora Province on the Filane aggression. They are now to be found in the Zuguma District, in Yelwa north-west of N'Gaski, and in the Bussa District below Wawa. They are described as a very dark race, good looking and well built.

[304] The tribal marks[1] consist of a scar on one cheek, stretching from the nose to the corner of the mouth. Some people, in addition, wear three small cuts at each corner of the mouth, and three small cuts on the chin. They practise circumcision.

The Nupe of Duchu, a town south of the Kaduna river, on the western angle of the Bako and Niger rivers, are talakawa to the Nupe. They are pagans and hold the "echu" snake [771] (probably a python) as sacred. This snake is said to emerge from the bush whenever it is wanted, which is always on the birth of a child, for a mother may not suckle her infant until the "echu" has touched her breasts.

The Ebe are settled in the Yelwa District of Kontagora, but are now almost extinct. They speak Haussa, as well as [304] a dialect of Nupe. They practise circumcision. Their tribal mark is a scar on each cheek from the nose to the corner of the mouth.

Etsu is the name given to a group of Gboda, Kupari, and Gbangiri from Kukuruku (Kabba Province), and Yoruba, who settled in the Sapke District and built the town of Etsu, becoming naturalised Nupe.

634 771 775 [245] "Kuso" is the Nupe word for a kola plantation and "Kusopa" means "the man who guards the kola trees." They live in the Labohzi District, an area celebrated for its kola trees, and a place where palm-oil flourishes, in the south-west of the province. They are pagans. They believe that each individual lives four times, in different existences of which this is the second. They believe that this life is an improvement on the last, where all people were very big and thickly made. In the next life they believe that people will be very tall, but thin, and in the fourth and last life that they will be tiny people, only one or two feet in height. This fourth phase comes at the end of the world when everybody has died, and it is regarded as a heaven, but it is not permanent, being followed by extinction. It is only the good people who can attain to it, as the wicked become bush-beasts. It is not clear whether they believe that the soul is immediately translated to the succeeding sphere or not, but they appear to think that a period of death comes between each phase.

[1] [i.e. Of the Bini subtribe.- Analyst]

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In this world they[1] sacrifice to a god called Dako-Gwoya, who takes visible form after harvest, when a big feast is held and much beer is drunk. He has the appearance of a man, but is higher than a double-storeyed house. He speaks and tells the people what to do in business and social matters, but though the women may hear him they may not see him. 634 771 776

The Nupe of Zumbufu (on the Niger) are of mixed blood, having intermarried freely with the Yoruba. Zumbufu was founded by a hunter early in the nineteenth century, who came from the Lafiaji District, but they were never tributary to any but the Bini of Bida. They were incorporated in the Share District of Ilorin Province in 1910. They too are pagans and worship a god called Bakoboya, who is recognised as far away as Padda in the Pategi Division, an evil spirit who brings sickness and famine. He appears in visible forms at festivals, in the guise (with the aid of a ten foot pole) of a very tall man. His representative dances round the town, surrounded by the head-men of Zumbufu, and throughout the dance they beat each other violently, but are said to feel no pain. 634 776

The inhabitants of Kutegi, Enegi, and Gbachi, are immigrants from Bornu. They still wear the Kanuri tribal marks, but they have adopted the Nupe language. 634 304 197 167

[1] [i.e. The Kusopa subtribe.--Analyst]

5: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1947
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634 182 173 is, in the influence upon actual social life which the belief in this 'truth' entails. The Kede tradition of origin, as we have seen, concerns itself above all with the beginnings of the political history of the tribe. In the fashion of such myths of origin, it anchors the existing system in a dim past, which, by its very remoteness and its supernatural and sacred associations, endows the present with an immensely convincing validity. The Kede tradition of origin ranges its strongest spiritual support behind what we now recognize to be the two fundamental features of their political system: the fact that the extent of Kede rule is defined on the basis of locality, and not tribe, and the fact that, within the larger political unit of Nupe kingdom, the Kede claim a semi-autonomous position. Let me emphasize that the knowledge of this tradition is not limited to the Kede, but is common to all Nupe sections, and among them the various *kintsozi* groups. The common possession of the myth represents a spiritual link of utmost importance: for with the myth the subjects of the Kede also accept the system which it is meant to guarantee—the overlordship of the Kede.

634 771 184 192 *Religion.* As I have mentioned, the Kede are to-day Mohammedans—very eager Mohammedans, in fact. In many settlements you will find *mallams* teaching the Koran to boys and adults, often pupils who are able to attend the classes only when their travels happen to take them to this place and allow them a short sojourn. The *kintsozi*, on the other hand, are still largely pagans. Moreover, against the solid religious unity of the Kede, the *kintsozi* show a certain diversity of religious rites and beliefs, which reflects the composite nature of this group.[1] However, there exist two rituals, both essentially river rituals, which are common to all the semi-riverain groups, and a third ritual, linked with the memory of Tsoede, which exists in all the larger riverain (and partly also inland) villages of Nupe. The first of these rituals is the *Ndáduma* (the Nupe name for the River Niger), an annual sacrifice to the spirits of the river, performed in all the different river villages

[1] We cannot say what the religious situation in the river valley has been in the earlier periods of Nupe history. The probability is that the Kede, as most Nupe sub-tribes, possessed certain special rites and beliefs, which were not shared by the other tribal groups. The characteristic difference between Kede and *kintsozi* to-day, between a solid religious unit on one side and a heterogeneous religious group on the other, would thus have been equally marked in the pre-Islamic era.

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and believed to procure, and at the same time to keep within limits, the annual flooding of the Niger. The second ritual is the *Ketsá*, a sacrifice to the spirit of the huge rock of the same name which rises abruptly from midstream near Jebba (known to Europeans as Juju-rock); this sacrifice is believed to cure illness and barrenness and to secure luck in fishing or trade. The third ritual is the sacrifice to the *Chain of Tsoede*, a sacred relic which secures fertility, prevents illness, and is also used as an instrument of ordeal.

Now, these three rituals also occur among the Kede; the first two have in fact been, as it were, usurped by them, and made to some extent their own concern. The Kede chief holds himself responsible for certain special, most conspicuous, performances of these river ceremonies. Once a year a special *Ndáduma* is performed in a place called Bazumagi, north of Jebba, the *Kuta* himself providing the sacrificial food, a white bull and honey. Unlike the local *Ndáduma* rituals, the *Ndáduma* of Bazumagi is enacted on behalf, not of a particular village, but of the whole population of the river valley. The chief's *Ndáduma* also shows another feature which is absent in the local rite: the priest climbs a rock in midstream and throws a stone towards the bank; the spot where the stone falls is believed to mark the line to which the river will rise that year. The *Ketsá* becomes a chief's ritual at the appointment of a new *Kuta*. About one month after his accession the new chief sends a bull (preferably white) to Jebba Island to be sacrificed there by the local priest, again on behalf of the whole riverain community, to inaugurate and secure a prosperous reign. A special *Chain of Tsoede* finally is kept in Muregi, in the house of one of the chief's councillors (see p. 176). He performs the annual sacrifice of beer and the blood of a sheep, beer and animal being again provided by the *Kuta* himself.

It is interesting to note that in none of these rituals may the *Kuta* or any member of his family be present. Thus the double nature of these rites, which, though stamped chief's rituals, are essentially rituals of the *kintsozi*, is conspicuously symbolized. The interests which they voice—the securing of safety and livelihood to the people on the river—are adopted and made their own by the Kede rulers. A single belief and a common cult comprise both rulers and ruled, notwithstanding the religious barriers which otherwise separate the two, and add to the political dependence of the *kintsozi* another, spiritual, dependence.